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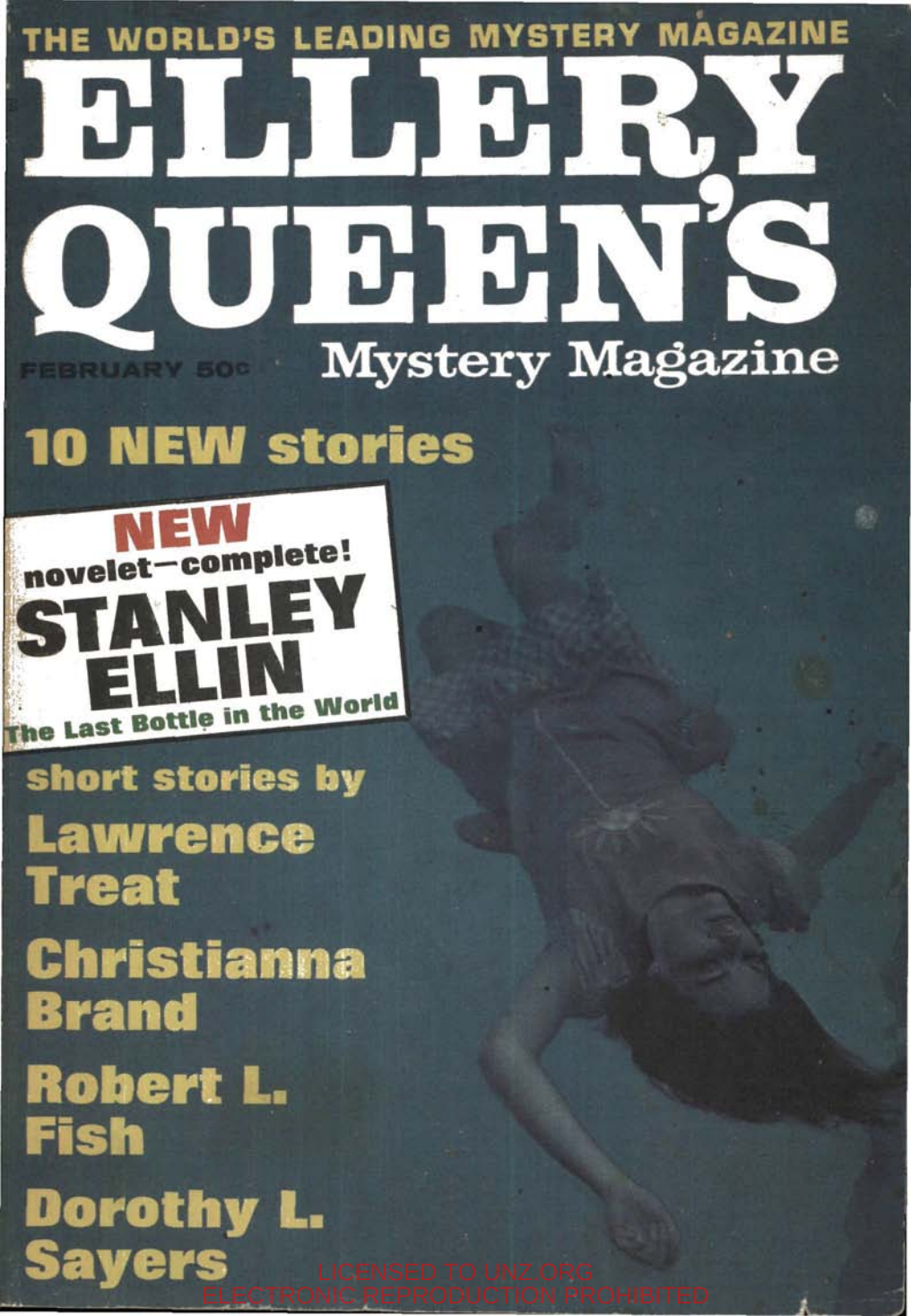

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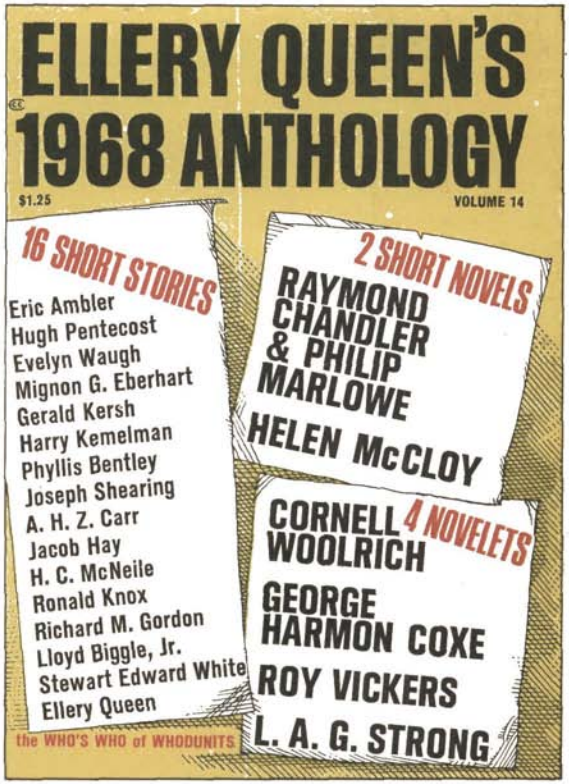

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the *NEWEST* crime novelet by STANLEY ELLIN

Are you familiar with an anthology titled DIONYSUS, *published in 1962 and edited by Clifton Fadiman? This anthology, subtitled "A Case of Vintage Tales about Wine," is unusual, possibly unique, and most unaccountably neglected, if not forgotten. The collection of stories is divided into seven sections of which one is called "Wine: A Mystery," and in this section there are detective-crime stories by Dorothy L. Sayers, E. C. Bentley, Michael Gilbert, Lawrence G. Blochman, Margery Allingham, and A. A. Milne; another section of the anthology contains mystery-crime stories by Roald Dahl and Edgar Allan Poe.*

Mr. Fadiman's Introduction and editorial comments are always interesting and scholarly, often witty and wise, and sometimes disquieting. If we have one strong reservation it is that too much of Mr. Fadiman's Introduction is devoted to faulting some of the stories and their creators. He takes to task the connoisseuseship of Dorothy L. Sayers and Margery Allingham, and in a lesser degree, the connoisseurship of Lawrence G. Blochman and Michael Gilbert; and surely he could have treated the too-often maligned Edgar Allan Poe with more understanding and sympathy. But perhaps anthologies, despite the implication that they usually are made up of the "best" or the "best of the best," should not be wholly laudatory of their contributors—it is at least a refreshing point of view.

Now, what has all this to do with the newest crime novelet by Stanley Ellin? Simply this: once a year Stanley Ellin writes a new story especially for EQMM—to aficionados (and criminological connoisseurs) an Annual Mystery Event—and this year's story from Mr. Ellin is a "vintage tale about wine." Had "The Last Bottle in the World" been written half a dozen years ago, we feel certain that Clifton Fadiman would have chosen it for his definitive and distinguished wine anthology. It is a tale with body and bouquet—and more, much more . . .

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THE LAST BOTTLE IN THE WORLD

by STANLEY ELLIN

IT WAS A BAD MOMENT. THIS CAFÉ on the rue de Rivoli near the Meurice had looked tempting, I had taken a chair at one of its sidewalk tables, and then, glancing casually across at the next table, had found myself staring into the eyes of a young woman who was looking at me with startled recognition. It was Madame Sophia Kassoulas. Suddenly, the past towered over me like a monstrous genie released from a bottle. The shock was so great that I could actually feel the blood draining from my face.

Madame Kassoulas was instantly at my side.

"Monsieur Drummond, what is it? You look so ill. Is there anything I can do?"

"No, no. A drink, that's all. Cognac, please."

She ordered me one, then sat down to solicitously undo the buttons of my jacket. "Oh, you men. The way you dress in this summer heat."

This might have been pleasant under other conditions, but I realized with embarrassment that the picture we offered the other patrons of the café must certainly be that of a pitiful, white-haired old grandpa being attended to by his soft-hearted granddaughter.

"Madame, I assure you—"

She pressed a finger firmly against my lips. "Please. Not another word until you've had your cognac and feel like yourself again. Not one little word."

I yielded the point. Besides, turnabout was fair play. During that nightmarish scene six months before when we were last in each other's company she had been the one to show weakness and I had been the one to apply the restoratives. Meeting me now, the woman must have been as hard hit by cruel memory as I was. I had to admire her for bearing up so well under the blow.

My cognac was brought to me, and even *in extremis,* so to speak, I automatically held it up to the sunlight to see its color. Madame Kassoulas' lips quirked in a faint smile.

"Dear Monsieur Drummond," she murmured. "Always the connoisseur."

Which, indeed, I was. And which, I saw on grim reflection, was how the whole thing had started on a sunny Parisian day like this the year before . . .

That was the day a man named Max de Marechal sought me out in the offices of my company, Broulet and Drummond, wine merchants, on the rue de Berri. I vaguely knew of de Marechal as the editor of a

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glossy little magazine, *La Cave,* published solely for the enlightenment of wine connoisseurs. Not a trade publication, but a sort of house organ for *La Société de la Cave,* a select little circle of amateur wine fanciers. Since I generally approved the magazine's judgments, I was pleased to meet its editor.

Face to face with him, however, I found myself disliking him intensely. In his middle forties, he was one of those dapper, florid types who resemble superannuated leading men. And there was a feverish volatility about him which put me on edge. I tend to be low-geared and phlegmatic myself. People who are always bouncing about on top of their emotions like a ping pong ball on a jet of water make me acutely uncomfortable.

The purpose of his visit, he said, was to obtain an interview from me. In preparation for a series of articles to be run in his magazine, he was asking various authorities on wine to express their opinions about the greatest vintage they had ever sampled. This way, perhaps, a consensus could be made and placed on record. If—

"If," I cut in, "you ever get agreement on the greatest vintage. Ask a dozen experts about it and you'll get a dozen different opinions."

"It did look like that at the start. By now, however, I have found some small agreement on the supremacy of two vintages."

"Which two?"

"Both are Burgundies. One is the Richebourg 1923. The other is the Romanée-Conti 1934. And both, of course, indisputably rank among the noblest wines."

"Indisputably."

"Would one of these be your own choice as the vintage without peer?"

"I refuse to make any choice, Monsieur de Marechal. When it comes to wines like these, comparisons are not merely odious, they are impossible."

"Then you do not believe any one vintage stands by itself beyond comparison?"

"No, it's possible there is one. I've never tasted it, but the descriptions written of it praise it without restraint. A Burgundy, of course, from an estate which never again produced anything like it. A very small estate. Have you any idea which vintage I'm referring to?"

"I believe I do." De Marechal's eyes gleamed with fervor. "The glorious Nuits Saint-Oen 1929. Am I right?"

"You are."

He shrugged helplessly. "But what good is knowing about it when I've never yet met anyone who has actually tasted it? I want my series of articles to be backed by living authorities. Those I've questioned all know about this legendary Saint-Oen, but not one has even seen a bottle of it. What a disaster when all that remains of such a vin-

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tage—possibly the greatest of all—should only be a legend. If there were only one wretched bottle left on the face of the earth—"

"Why are you so sure there isn't?" I said.

"Why?" De Marechal gave me a pitying smile. "Because, my dear Drummond, there can't be. I was at the Saint-Oen estate myself not long ago. The *vigneron's* records there attest that only forty dozen cases of the 1929 were produced altogether. Consider. A scant forty dozen cases spread over all the years from then to now, and with thousands of connoisseurs thirsting for them. I assure you, the last bottle was emptied a generation ago."

I had not intended to come out with it, but that superior smile of his got under my skin.

"I'm afraid your calculations are a bit off, my dear de Marechal." It was going to be a pleasure setting him back on his heels. "You see, a bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 is, at this very moment, resting in my company's cellars."

The revelation jarred him as hard as I thought it would. His jaw fell. He gaped at me in speechless wonderment. Then his face darkened with suspicion.

"You're joking," he said. "You must be. You just told me you've never tasted the vintage. Now you tell me—"

"Only the truth. After my partner's death last year I found the bottle among his private stock."

"And you haven't been tempted to open it?"

"I resist the temptation. The wine is dangerously old. It would be extremely painful to open it and find it has already died."

"Ah, no!" De Marechal clapped a hand to his brow. "You're an American, monsieur, that's your trouble. Only an American could talk this way, someone who's inherited the obscene Puritan pleasure in self-denial. And for the last existing bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 to have such an owner! It won't do. It absolutely will not do. Monsieur Drummond, we must come to terms. What price do you ask for this Saint-Oen?"

"None. It is not for sale."

"It must be for sale!" de Marechal said explosively. With an effort he got himself under control. "Look, I'll be frank with you. I am not a rich man. You could get at least a thousand francs—possibly as much as two thousand—for that bottle of wine, and I'm in no position to lay out that kind of money. But I am close to someone who can meet any terms you set. Monsieur Kyros Kassoulas. Perhaps you know of him?"

Since Kyros Kassoulas was one of the richest men on the Continent, someone other magnates approached with their hats off, it would be hard not to know of him despite his well-publicized efforts to live in close seclusion.

"Of course," I said.

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"And do you know of the one great interest in his life?"

"I can't say I do. According to the newspapers, he seems to be quite the man of mystery."

"A phrase concocted by journalists to describe anyone of such wealth who chooses to be reticent about his private affairs. Not that there is anything scandalous about them. You see, Monsieur Kassoulas is a fanatic connoisseur of wines." De Marechal gave me a meaningful wink. "That's how I interested him in founding our *Société de la Cave* and in establishing its magazine."

"And in making you its editor."

"So he did," said de Marechal calmly. "Naturally, I'm grateful to him for that. He, in turn, is grateful to me for giving him sound instruction on the great vintages. Strictly between us, he was a sad case when I first met him. A man without any appetite for vice, without any capacity to enjoy literature or music or art, he was being driven to distraction by the emptiness of his life. I filled that emptiness the day I pointed out to him that he must cultivate his extraordinarily true palate for fine wine. The exploration of the worthier vintages since then has been for him a journey through a wonderland. By now, as I have said, he is a fanatic connoisseur. He would know without being told that your bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 is to other wines what the Mona Lisa is to other paintings. Do you see what that means to you in a business way? He's a tough man to bargain with, but in the end he'll pay two thousand francs for that bottle. You have my word on it."

I shook my head. "I can only repeat, Monsieur de Marechal, the wine is not for sale. There is no price on it."

"And I insist you set a price on it!"

That was too much.

"All right," I said, "then the price is one hundred thousand francs. And without any guarantee the wine isn't dead. One hundred thousand francs exactly."

"Ah," de Marechal said furiously, "so you really don't intend to sell it! But to play dog in the manger—!"

Suddenly he went rigid. His features contorted, his hands clutched convulsively at his chest. As crimson with passion as his face had been the moment before, it was now ghastly pale and bloodless. He lowered himself heavily into a chair.

"My heart," he gasped in agonized explanation. "It's all right. I have pills—"

The pill he slipped under his tongue was nitroglycerine, I was sure. I had once seen my late partner Broulet undergo a seizure like this.

"I'll call a doctor," I said, but when I went to the phone de Marechal made a violent gesture of protest.

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"No, don't bother. I'm used to this. It's an old story with me."

He was, in fact, looking better now.

"If it's an old story you should know better," I told him. "For a man with a heart condition you allow yourself to become much too emotional."

"Do I? And how would you feel, my friend, if you saw a legendary vintage suddenly appear before you and then found it remained just out of reach? No, forgive me for that. It's your privilege not to sell your goods if you don't choose to."

"It is."

"But one small favor. Would you, at least, allow me to see the bottle of Saint-Oen? I'm not questioning its existence. It's only that the pleasure of viewing it, of holding it in my hands—"

It was a small enough favor to grant him. The cellars of Broulet and Drummond were near the Halles au Vin, a short trip by car from the office. There I conducted him through the cool, stony labyrinth bordering the Seine, led him to the Nuits Saint-Oen racks where, apart from all the lesser vintages of later years, the one remaining bottle of 1929 rested in solitary grandeur. I carefully took it down and handed it to de Marechal, who received it with reverence.

He examined the label with an expert eye, delicately ran a fingertip over the cork. "The cork is in good condition."

"What of it? That can't save the wine if its time has already come."

"Naturally. But it's an encouraging sign." He held the bottle up to peer through it. "And there seems to be only a normal sediment. Bear in mind, Monsieur Drummond, that some great Burgundies have lived for fifty years. Some even longer."

He surrendered the bottle to me with reluctance. His eyes remained fixed on it so intensely as I replaced it in the rack that he looked like a man under hypnosis. I had to nudge him out of the spell before I could lead him upstairs to the sunlit outer world.

We parted there.

"I'll keep in touch with you," he said as we shook hands. "Perhaps we can get together for lunch later this week."

"I'm sorry," I said without regret, "but later this week I'm leaving for New York to look in on my office there."

"Too bad. But of course you'll let me know as soon as you return to Paris."

"Of course," I lied.

However, there was no putting off Max de Marechal now that he had that vision of the Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 before his eyes. He must have bribed one of the help in my Paris office to tell him when I was back from the States, because no sooner was I again at my desk on the rue de Berri than he was on

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the phone. He greeted me with fervor. What luck he had timed his call so perfectly! My luck, as well as his. Why? Because *La Société de la Cave* was to have a dinner the coming week-end, a positive orgy of wine sampling, and its presiding officer, Kyros Kassoulas himself, had requested my presence at it!

My first impulse was to refuse the invitation. For one thing, I knew its motive. Kassoulas had been told about the Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 and wanted to get me where he could personally bargain for it without losing face. For another thing, these wine-tasting sessions held by various societies of connoisseurs were not for me. Sampling a rare and excellent vintage is certainly among life's most rewarding experiences, but, for some reason I could never fathom, doing it in the company of one's fellow *aficionados* seems to bring out all the fakery hidden away in the soul of even the most honest citizen. And to sit there, watching ordinarily sensible men vie with each other in their portrayals of ecstasy over a glass of wine, rolling their eyes, flaring their nostrils, straining to find the most incongruous adjectives with which to describe it, has always been a trial to me.

Weighed against all this was simple curiosity. Kyros Kassaoulas was a remote and awesome figure, and here I was being handed the chance to actually meet him. In the end, curiosity won. I attended the dinner, I met Kassoulas there, and I quickly realized, with gratification, that we were striking it off perfectly.

It was easy to understand why. As de Marechal had put it, Kyros Kassoulas was a fanatic on wines, a man with a single-minded interest in their qualities, their history, and their lore; and I could offer him more information on the subject than anyone else he knew. More, he pointed out to me, than even the knowledgeable Max de Marechal.

As the dinner progressed, it intrigued me to observe that where everyone else in the room deferred to Kassoulas—especially de Marechal, a shameless sycophant—Kassoulas himself deferred to me. I enjoyed that. Before long I found myself really liking the man instead of merely being impressed by him.

He was impressive, of course. About fifty, short and barrel-chested, with a swarthy, deeply lined face and almost simian ears, he was ugly in a way that some clever women would find fascinating. Somehow, he suggested an ancient idol roughhewn out of a block of mahogany. His habitual expression was a granite impassivity, relieved at times by a light of interest in those veiled, ever-watchful eyes. That light became intense when he finally touched on the matter of my bottle of Saint-Oen.

He had been told its price, he remarked with wry humor, and felt that a hundred thousand francs—

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twenty thousand hard American dollars—was, perhaps, a little excessive. Now if I would settle for two thousand francs—

I smilingly shook my head.

"It's a handsome offer," Kassoulas said. "It happens to be more than I've paid for any half dozen bottles of wine in my cellar."

"I won't dispute that, Monsieur Kassoulas."

"But you won't sell, either. What are the chances of the wine's being fit to drink?"

"Who can tell? The 1929 vintage at Saint-Oen was late to mature, so it may live longer than most. Or it may already be dead. That's why I won't open the bottle myself or sell anyone else the privilege of opening it. This way, it's a unique and magnificent treasure. Once its secret is out, it may simply be another bottle of wine gone bad."

To his credit, he understood that. And, when he invited me to be a guest at his estate near Saint-Cloud the next week-end, it was with the blunt assurance that it was only my company he sought, not the opportunity to further dicker for the bottle of Saint-Oen. In fact, said he, he would never again broach the matter. All he wanted was my word that if I ever decided to sell the bottle, he would be given first chance to make an offer for it. And to that I cheerfully agreed.

The week-end at his estate was a pleasant time for me, the first of many I spent there. It was an enormous place, but smoothly run by a host of efficient help under the authority of a burly, grizzled majordomo named Joseph. Joseph was evidently Kassoulas' devoted slave. It came as no surprise to learn he had been a sergeant in the Foreign Legion. He responded to orders as if his master was the colonel of his regiment.

What did come as a surprise was the lady of the house, Sophia Kassoulas. I don't know exactly what I expected Kassoulas' wife to be like, but certainly not a girl young enough to be his daughter, a gentle, timid creature whose voice was hardly more than a whisper. By today's standards which require a young woman to be a lank-haired rack of bones she was, perhaps, a little too voluptuous, a little too ripely curved, but I am an old-fashioned sort of man who believes women should be ripely curved. And if, like Sophia Kassoulas, they are pale, dark-eyed, blushing beauties, so much the better.

As time passed and I became more and more a friend of the family, I was able to draw from her the story of her marriage, now approaching its fifth anniversary. Sophia Kassoulas was a distant cousin of her husband. Born to poor parents in a mountain village of Greece, convent bred, she had met Kassoulas for the first time at a gathering of the family in Athens, and, hardly out of her girlhood, had married him soon afterward.

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She was, she assured me in that soft little voice, the most fortunate of women. Yes, to have been chosen by a man like Kyros to be his wife, surely the most fortunate of women—

But she said it as if she were desperately trying to convince herself of it. In fact, she seemed frightened to death of Kassoulas. When he addressed the most commonplace remark to her she shrank away from him. It became a familiar scene, watching this happen, and watching him respond to it by then treating her with an icily polite disregard that only intimidated her the more.

It made an unhealthy situation in that household because, as I saw from the corner of my eye, the engaging Max de Marechal was always right there to soothe Madame's fears away. It struck me after a while how very often an evening at Saint-Cloud wound up with Kassoulas and myself holding a discussion over our brandy at one end of the room while Madame Kassoulas and Max de Marechal were head to head in conversation at the other end. There was nothing indecorous about those *tête-á-têtes,* but still I didn't like the look of them. The girl appeared to be as wide-eyed and ingenuous as a doe, and de Marechal bore all the earmarks of the trained predator.

Kassoulas himself was either unaware of this or remarkably indifferent to it. Certainly, his regard for de Marechal was genuine. He mentioned it to me several times, and once, when de Marechal got himself dangerously heated up in an argument with me over the merits of some vintage or other, Kassoulas said to him with real concern, "Gently, Max, gently. Remember your heart. How many times has the doctor warned you against becoming over-excited?"—which, for Kassoulas, was an unusual show of feeling. Generally, like so many men of his type, he seemed wholly incapable of expressing any depth of emotion.

Indeed, the only time he ever let slip any show of his feelings about his troublesome marriage was once when I was inspecting his wine cellar with him and pointed out that a dozen Volnay-Caillerets 1955 he had just laid in were likely to prove extremely uneven. It had been a mistake to buy it. One never knew, in uncorking a bottle, whether or not he would find it sound.

Kassoulas shook his head.

"It was a calculated risk, Monsieur Drummond, not a mistake. I don't make mistakes." Then he gave an almost imperceptible little shrug. "Well, one perhaps. When a man marries a mere child—"

He cut it short at that. It was the first and last time he ever touched on the subject. What he wanted to talk about was wine, although sometimes under my prodding and because I was a good listener, he would recount stories about his past.

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My own life has been humdrum. It fascinated me to learn, in bits and pieces, about the life of Kyros Kassoulas, a Piraeus wharf rat who was a thief in his childhood, a smuggler in his youth, and a multimillionaire before he was thirty. It gave me the same sense of drama Kassoulas appeared to feel when I would recount to him stories about some of the great vintages which, like the Nuits Saint-Oen 1929, had been cranky and uncertain in the barrel until, by some miracle of nature, they had suddenly blossomed into their full greatness.

It was at such times that Max de Marechal himself was at his best. Watching him grow emotional in such discussions, I had to smile inwardly at the way he had once condescendingly described Kassoulas as a fanatic about wines. It was a description which fitted him even better. Whatever else might be false about Max de Marechal, his feelings about any great vintage were genuine.

During the months that passed, Kassoulas proved to be as good as his word. He had said he wouldn't again bargain with me for the precious bottle of Saint-Oen, and he didn't. We discussed the Saint-Oen often enough—it was an obsession with de Marechal—but no matter how much Kassoulas was tempted to renew the effort to buy it, he kept his word.

Then, one dismally cold and rainy day in early December, my secretary opened my office door to announce in awestruck tones that Monsieur Kyros Kassoulas was outside waiting to see me. This was a surprise. Although Sophia Kassoulas, who seemed to have no friends in the world apart from de Marechal and myself, had several times been persuaded to have lunch with me when she was in town to do shopping, her husband had never before deigned to visit me in my domain, and I was not expecting him now.

He came in accompanied by the ever dapper de Marechal who, I saw with increased mystification, was in a state of feverish excitement.

We had barely exchanged greetings when de Marechal leaped directly to the point.

"The bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929, Monsieur Drummond," he said. "You'll remember you once set a price on it. One hundred thousand francs."

"Only because it won't be bought at any such price."

"Would you sell it for less?"

"I've already made clear I wouldn't."

"You drive a hard bargain, Monsieur Drummond. But you'll be pleased to know that Monsieur Kassoulas is now prepared to pay your price."

I turned incredulously to Kassoulas. Before I could recover my voice, he drew a check from his pocket and, impassive as ever, handed it to me. Involuntarily, I glanced at it. It

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was for one hundred thousand francs. It was worth, by the going rate of exchange, twenty thousand dollars.

"This is ridiculous," I finally managed to say. "I can't take it."

"But you must!" de Marechal said in alarm.

"I'm sorry. No wine is worth a fraction of this. Especially a wine that may be dead in the bottle."

"Ah," said Kassoulas lightly, "then perhaps that's what I'm paying for—the chance to see whether it is or not."

"If that's your reason—" I protested, and Kassoulas shook his head.

"It isn't. The truth is, my friend, this wine solves a difficult problem for me. A great occasion is coming soon, the fifth anniversary of my marriage, and I've been wondering how Madame and I could properly celebrate it. Then inspiration struck me. What better way of celebrating it than to open the Saint-Oen and discover it is still in the flush of perfect health, still in its flawless maturity? What could be more deeply moving and significant on such an occasion?"

"That makes it all the worse if the wine is dead," I pointed out. The check was growing warm in my hand. I wanted to tear it up but couldn't bring myself to do it.

"No matter. The risk is all mine," said Kassoulas. "Of course, you'll be there to judge the wine for yourself. I insist on that. It will be a memorable experience, no matter how it goes. A small dinner with just the four of us at the table, and the Saint-Oen as climax to the occasion."

"The *pièce de résistance* must be an *entrecôte,*" breathed de Marechal. "Beef, of course. It will suit the wine perfectly."

I had somehow been pushed past the point of no return. Slowly I folded the check for the hundred thousand francs and placed it in my wallet. After all, I was in the business of selling wine for a profit.

"When is this dinner to be held?" I asked. "Remember that the wine must stand a few days before it's decanted."

"Naturally, I'm allowing for that," said Kassoulas. "Today is Monday; the dinner will be held Saturday. That means more than enough time to prepare every detail perfectly. On Wednesday I'll see that the temperature of the dining room is properly adjusted, the table set, and the bottle of Saint-Oen placed upright on it for the sediment to clear properly. The room will then be locked to avoid any mishap. By Saturday the last of the sediment should have settled completely. But I don't plan to decant the wine. I intend to serve it directly from the bottle."

"Risky," I said.

"Not if it's poured with a steady hand. One like this." Kassoulas held out a stubby-fingered, powerful-looking hand which showed not a sign of tremor. "Yes, this supreme

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vintage deserves the honor of being poured from its own bottle, risky as that may be. Surely you now have evidence, Monsieur Drummond, that I'm a man to take any risk if it's worthwhile to me."

I had good cause to remember those concluding words at a meeting I had with Sophia Kassoulas later in the week. That day she phoned early in the morning to ask if I could meet her for lunch at an hour when we might have privacy in the restaurant, and, thinking this had something to do with her own plans for the anniversary dinner, I cheerfully accepted the invitation. All the cheerfulness was washed out of me as soon as I joined her at our table in a far corner of the dimly lit, almost deserted room. She was obviously terrified.

"Something is very wrong," I said to her. "What is it?"

"Everything," she said piteously. "And you're the only one I can turn to for help, Monsieur Drummond. You've always been so kind to me. Will you help me now?"

"Gladly. If you tell me what's wrong and what I can do about it."

"Yes, there's no way around that. You must be told everything." Madame Kassoulas drew a shuddering breath. "It can be told very simply. I had an affair with Max de Marechal. Now Kyros has found out about it."

My heart sank. The last thing in the world I wanted was to get involved in anything like this.

"Madame," I said unhappily, "this is a matter to be settled between you and your husband. You must see that it's not my business at all."

"Oh, please! If you only understood—"

"I don't see what there is to understand."

"A great deal. About Kyros, about me, about my marriage. I didn't want to marry Kyros, I didn't want to marry anybody. But my family arranged it, so what could I do? And it's been dreadful from the start. All I am to Kyros is a pretty little decoration for his house. He has no feeling for me. He cares more about that bottle of wine he bought from you than he does for me. Where I'm concerned, he's like stone. But Max—"

"I know," I said wearily. "You found that Max was different. Max cared very much for you. Or, at least, he told you he did."

"Yes, he told me he did," Madame Kassoulas said with defiance. "And whether he meant it not, I needed that. A woman must have some man to tell her he cares for her or she has nothing. But it was wicked of me to put Max in danger. And now that Kyros knows about us Max is in terrible danger."

"What makes you think so? Has your husband made any threats?"

"No, he hasn't even said he knows about the affair. But he does. I can swear he does. It's in the way he's been behaving toward me these past few days, in the remarks he makes

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to me, as if he were enjoying a joke that only he understood. And it all seems to have something to do with that bottle of Saint-Oen locked up in the dining room. That's why I came to you for help. You know about these things."

"Madame, all I know is that the Saint-Oen is being made ready for your dinner party Saturday."

"Yes, that's what Kyros said. But the way he said it—" Madame Kassoulas leaned toward me intently. "Tell me one thing. Is it possible for a bottle of wine to be poisoned without its cork being drawn? Is there any way of doing that?"

"Oh, come now. Do you seriously believe for a moment that your husband intends to poison Max?"

"You don't know Kyros the way I do. You don't know what he's capable of."

"Even murder?"

"Even murder, if he was sure he could get away with it. They tell a story in my family about how, when he was very young, he killed a man who had cheated him out of a little money. Only it was done so cleverly that the police never found out who the murderer was."

That was when I suddenly recalled Kassoulas' words about taking any risk if it were worthwhile to him and felt a chill go through me. All too vividly, I had a mental picture of a hypodermic needle sliding through the cork in that bottle of Saint-Oen, of drops of deadly poison trickling into the wine. Then it struck me how wildly preposterous the picture was.

"Madame," I said, "I'll answer your question this way. Your husband does not intend to poison anyone at your dinner party unless he intends to poison us all, which I am sure he does not. Remember that I've also been invited to enjoy my share of the Saint-Oen."

"What if something were put into Max's glass alone?"

"It won't be. Your husband has too much respect for Max's palate for any such clumsy trick. If the wine is dead, Max will know it at once and won't drink it. If it's still good, he'd detect anything foreign in it with the first sip and not touch the rest. Anyhow, why not discuss it with Max? He's the one most concerned."

"I did try to talk to him about it, but he only laughed at me. He said it was all in my imagination. I know why. He's so insanely eager to try that wine that he won't let anything stop him from doing it."

"I can appreciate his feelings about that." Even with my equanimity restored I was anxious to get away from this unpleasant topic. "And he's right about your imagination. If you really want my advice, the best thing you can do is to behave with your husband as if nothing has happened and to steer clear of Monsieur de Marechal after this."

It was the only advice I could give her under the circumstances. I only hoped she wasn't too panic-stricken

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to follow it. Or too infatuated with Max de Marechal.

Knowing too much for my own comfort, I was ill at ease the evening of the party, so when I joined the company it was a relief to see that Madame Kassoulas had herself well in hand. As for Kassoulas, I could detect no change at all in his manner toward her or de Marechal. It was convincing evidence that Madame's guilty conscience had indeed been working overtime on her imagination, and that Kassoulas knew nothing at all about her *affaire*. He was hardly the man to take being cuckolded with composure, and he was wholly composed. As we sat down to dinner, it was plain that his only concern was about its menu, and, above all, about the bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 standing before him.

The bottle had been standing there three days, and everything that could be done to insure the condition of its contents had been done. The temperature of the room was moderate; it had not been allowed to vary once the bottle was brought into the room, and, as Max de Marechal assured me, he had checked this at regular intervals every day. And, I was sure, had taken time to stare rapturously at the bottle, marking off the hours until it would be opened.

Furthermore, since the table at which our little company sat down was of a size to seat eighteen or twenty, it meant long distances between our places, but it provided room for the bottle to stand in lonely splendor clear of any careless hand that might upset it. It was noticeable that the servants waiting on us all gave it a wide berth. Joseph, the burly, hardbitten majordomo who was supervising them with a dangerous look in his eye, must have put them in fear of death if they laid a hand near it.

Now Kassoulas had to undertake two dangerous procedures as preludes to the wine-tasting ritual. Ordinarily, a great vintage like the Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 stands until all its sediment has collected in the base of the bottle, and is then decanted. This business of transferring it from bottle to decanter not only insures that sediment and cork crumbs are left behind, but it also means that the wine is being properly aired. The older a wine, the more it needs to breathe the open air to rid itself of mustiness accumulated in the bottle.

But Kassoulas, in his determination to honor the Saint-Oen by serving it directly from its original bottle, had imposed on himself the delicate task of uncorking it at the table so skillfully that no bits of cork would filter into the liquid. Then, after the wine had stood open until the entrée was served, he would have to pour it with such control that none of the sediment in its base would roil up. It had taken three days for that sediment to settle. The

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least slip in uncorking the bottle or pouring from it, and it would be another three days before it was again fit to drink.

As soon as we were at the table, Kassoulas set to work on the first task. We all watched with bated breath as he grasped the neck of the bottle firmly and centered the point of the corkscrew in the cork. Then, with the concentration of a demolitions expert defusing a live bomb, he slowly, very slowly, turned the corkscrew, bearing down so lightly that the corkscrew almost had to take hold by itself. His object was to penetrate deep enough to get a grip on the cork so that it could be drawn, yet not to pierce the cork through; it was the one sure way of keeping specks of cork from filtering into the wine.

It takes enormous strength to draw a cork which has not been pierced through from a bottle of wine which it has sealed for decades. The bottle must be kept upright and immobile, the pull must be straight up and steady without any of the twisting and turning that will tear a cork apart. The old-fashioned corkscrew which exerts no artificial leverage is the instrument for this because it allows one to feel the exact working of the cork in the bottleneck.

The hand Kassoulas had around the bottle clamped it so hard that his knuckles gleamed white. His shoulders hunched, the muscles of his neck grew taut. Strong as he appeared to be, it seemed impossible for him to start the cork. But he would not give way, and in the end it was the cork that gave way. Slowly and smoothly it was pulled clear of the bottle-mouth, and for the first time since the wine had been drawn from its barrel long years before, it was now free to breathe the open air.

Kassoulas waved the cork back and forth under his nose, sampling its bouquet. He shrugged as he handed it to me.

"Impossible to tell anything this way," he said, and of course he was right. The fumes of fine Burgundy emanating from the cork meant nothing, since even dead wine may have a good bouquet.

De Marechal would not even bother to look at the cork.

"It's only the wine that matters," he said fervently. "Only the wine. And in an hour we'll know its secret for better or worse. It will seem like a long hour, I'm afraid."

I didn't agree with that at first. The dinner we were served was more than sufficient distraction for me. Its menu, in tribute to the Nuits Saint-Oen 1929, had been arranged the way a symphony conductor might arrange a short program of lighter composers in preparation for the playing of a Beethoven masterwork. Artichoke hearts in a butter sauce, *langouste* in mushrooms, and, to clear the palate, a lemon ice unusually tart. Simple dishes flawlessly prepared.

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And the wines Kassoulas had selected to go with them were, I was intrigued to note, obviously chosen as settings for his diamond. A sound Chablis, a respectable Muscadet. Both were good, neither was calculated to do more than draw a small nod of approval from the connoisseur. It was Kassoulas' way of telling us that nothing would be allowed to dim the glorious promise of that open bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen standing before us.

Then my nerves began to get the better of me. Old as I was at the game, I found myself more and more filled with tension and as the dinner progressed I found the bottle of Saint-Oen a magnet for my eyes. It soon became an agony, waiting until the entrée would be served and the Saint-Oen poured.

Who, I wondered, would be given the honor of testing the first few drops? Kassoulas, the host, was entitled to that honor, but as a mark of respect he could assign it to anyone he chose. I wasn't sure whether or not I wanted to be chosen. I was braced for the worst, but I knew that being the first at the table to discover the wine was dead would be like stepping from an airplane above the clouds without a parachute. Yet, to be the first to discover that this greatest of vintages had survived the years—! Watching Max de Marechal, crimson with mounting excitement, sweating so that he had to constantly mop his brow, I suspected he was sharing my every thought.

The entrée was brought in at last, the *entrecôte* of beef that de Marechal had suggested. Only a salver of *petits pois* accompanied it. The *entrecôte* and peas were served. Then Kassoulas gestured at Joseph, and the majordomo cleared the room of the help. There must be no chance of disturbance while the wine was being poured, no possible distraction.

When the servants were gone and the massive doors of the dining room were closed behind them, Joseph returned to the table and took up his position near Kassoulas, ready for anything that might be required of him.

The time had come.

Kassoulas took hold of the bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929. He lifted it slowly, with infinite care, making sure not to disturb the treacherous sediment. A ruby light flickered from it as he held it at arm's length, staring at it with brooding eyes.

"Monsieur Drummond, you were right," he said abruptly.

"I was?" I said, taken aback. "About what?"

"About your refusal to unlock the secret of this bottle. You once said that as long as the bottle kept its secret it was an extraordinary treasure, but that once it was opened it might prove to be nothing but another bottle of bad wine. A disaster. Worse than a disaster, a joke. That was the truth. And in the face of it I now find I haven't the courage to

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learn whether or not what I am holding here is a treasure or a joke."

De Marechal almost writhed with impatience.

"It's too late for that!" he protested violently. "The bottle is already open!"

"But there's a solution to my dilemma," Kassoulas said to him. "Now watch it. Watch it very closely."

His arm moved carrying the bottle clear of the table. The bottle slowly tilted. Stupefied, I saw wine spurt from it, pour over the polished boards of the floor. Drops of wine spattered Kassoulas' shoes, stained the cuffs of his trousers. The puddle on the floor grew larger. Trickles of it crept out in thin red strings between the boards.

It was an unearthly choking sound from de Marechal which tore me free of the spell I was in. A wild cry of anguish from Sophia Kassoulas.

"Max!" she screamed. "Kyros, stop! For God's sake, stop! Don't you see what you're doing to him?"

She had reason to be terrified. I was terrified myself when I saw de Marechal's condition. His face was ashen, his mouth gaped wide open, his eyes, fixed on the stream of wine relentlessly gushing out of the bottle in Kassoulas' unwavering hand, were starting out of his head with horror.

Sophia Kassoulas ran to his side but he feebly thrust her away and tried to struggle to his feet. His hands reached out in supplication to the fast emptying bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929.

"Joseph," Kassoulas said dispassionately, "see to Monsieur de Marechal. The doctor warned that he must not move during these attacks."

The iron grasp Joseph clamped on de Marechal's shoulder prevented him from moving, but I saw his pallid hand fumbling into a pocket, and at last regained my wits.

"In his pocket!" I pleaded. "He has pills!"

It was too late. De Marechal suddenly clutched at his chest in that familiar gesture of unbearable pain, then his entire body went limp, his head lolling back against the chair, his eyes turning up in his head to glare sightlessly at the ceiling. The last thing they must have seen was the stream of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 become a trickle, the trickle become an ooze of sediment clotting on the floor in the middle of the vast puddle there.

Too late to do anything for de Marechal, but Sophia Kassoulas stood swaying on her feet ready to faint. Weak-kneed myself, I helped her to her chair, saw to it that she downed the remains of the Chablis in her glass.

The wine penetrated her stupor. She sat there breathing hard, staring at her husband until she found the strength to utter words.

"You knew it would kill him," she whispered. "That's why you

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bought the wine. That's why you wasted it all."

"Enough, madame," Kassoulas said frigidly. "You don't know what you're saying. And you're embarrassing our guest with this emotionalism." He turned to me. "It's sad that our little party had to end this way, monsieur, but these things do happen. Poor Max. He invited disaster with his temperament. Now I think you had better go. The doctor must be called in to make an examination and fill out the necessary papers, and these medical matters can be distressing to witness. There's no need for you to be put out by them. I'll see you to the door."

I got away from there without knowing how. All I knew was that I had seen a murder committed and there was nothing I could do about it. Absolutely nothing. Merely to say aloud that what I had seen take place was murder would be enough to convict me of slander in any court. Kyros Kassoulas had planned and executed his revenge flawlessly, and all it would cost him, by my bitter calculations, were one hundred thousand francs and the loss of a faithless wife. It was unlikely that Sophia Kassoulas would spend another night in his house even if she had to leave it with only the clothes on her back.

I never heard from Kassoulas again after that night. For that much, at least, I was grateful . . .

Now, six months later, here I was at a café table on the rue de Rivoli with Sophia Kassoulas, a second witness to the murder and as helplessly bound to silence about it as I was. Considering the shock given me by our meeting, I had to admire her own composure as she hovered over me solicitously, saw to it that I took down a cognac and then another, chattered brightly about inconsequential things as if that could blot the recollection of the past from our minds.

She had changed since I had last seen her. Changed all for the better. The timid girl had become a lovely woman who glowed with self-assurance. The signs were easy to read. Somewhere, I was sure, she had found the right man for her and this time not a brute like Kassoulas or a shoddy Casanova like Max de Marechal.

The second cognac made me feel almost myself again, and when I saw my Samaritan glance at the small, brilliantly jeweled watch on her wrist I apologized for keeping her and thanked her for her kindness.

"Small kindness for such a friend," she said reproachfully. She rose and gathered up her gloves and purse. "But I did tell Kyros I would meet him at—"

"Kyros!"

"But of course. Kyros. My husband." Madame Kassoulas looked at me with puzzlement.

"Then you're still living with him?"

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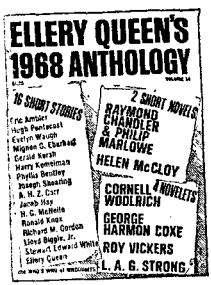
"Very happily." Then her face cleared. "You must forgive me for being so slow-witted. It took a moment to realize why you should ask such a question."

"Madame, I'm the one who should apologize. After all—"

"No, no, you had every right to ask it." Madame Kassoulas smiled at me. "But it's sometimes hard to remember I was ever unhappy with Kyros, the way everything changed so completely for me that night—

"But you were there, Monsieur Drummond. You saw for yourself how Kyros emptied the bottle of Saint-Oen on the floor, all because of me. What a revelation that was! What an awakening! And when it dawned on me that I really did mean more to him than even the last bottle of Nuits Saint-Oen 1929 in the whole world, when I found the courage to go to his room that night and tell him how this made me feel —oh, my dear Monsieur Drummond, it's been heaven for us ever since!"



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Here is the Dorothy L. Sayers story in Clifton Fadiman's anthology, DIONYSUS. *One of Mr. Fadiman's criticisms of the story concerns Lord Peter Wimsey's reputation for an "unequaled palate" when it comes to the identification of wines. "Yet," asks Mr. Fadiman, "would he be quite so fulsome in his praise of 'Napoleon brandy'? Indeed, would the knowledgeable Count offer it? For it is a matter of common notoriety that 'Napoleon brandy' is a mere trade name, a trap for the gullible, and indeed a meaningless label . . . Also, unless [Mr. Fadiman] misread the text, there is an implication in Miss Sayers' narrative that the adjective 'sweet' can be applied to Montrachet. One must demur."*

Well, one must, we suppose, demur—but not about the story as a whole. It is still perhaps Miss Sayers' best short story about Lord Peter Wimsey, and it will tingle the thirst-buds of even a connoisseur of "unequaled palate" . . .

A MATTER OF TASTE

by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

HALTE-LÀ! . . . ATTENTION! . . . F—e!"

The young man in the gray suit pushed his way through the protesting porters and leaped nimbly for the footboard of the guard's van as the Paris-Evreux express steamed out of the Invalides. The guard, with an eye to a tip, fielded him adroitly from among the detaining hands.

"It is happy for monsieur that he is so agile," he remarked. "Monsieur is in a hurry?"

"Somewhat. Thank you. I can get through by the corridor?"

"But certainly. The *premières* are two coaches away, beyond the luggage van."

The young man rewarded his rescuer, and made his way forward, mopping his face. As he passed the piled-up luggage, something caught his eye, and he stopped to investigate. It was a suitcase, nearly new, of expensive-looking leather, labeled conspicuously:

LORD PETER WIMSEY,
Hôtel Saumon d'Or,
Verneuil-sur-Eure.

and bore witness to its itinerary thus:

LONDON—PARIS
(Waterloo) (Gare St. Lazare)
via Southampton-Havre.
PARIS—VERNEUIL
(Ch. de Fer de l'Ouest)

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The young man whistled, and sat down on a trunk to think it out.

Somewhere there had been a leakage, and they were on his trail. Nor did they care who knew it. There were hundreds of people in London and Paris who would know the name of Wimsey, not counting the police of both countries. In addition to belonging to one of the oldest ducal families in England, Lord Peter had made himself conspicuous by his meddling with crime detection. A label like this was a gratuitous advertisement.

But the amazing thing was that the pursuers were not troubling to hide themselves from the pursued. That argued very great confidence. That he should have got into the guard's van was, of course, an accident, but, even so, he might have seen it on the platform, or anywhere.

An accident? It occurred to him —not for the first time, but definitely now, and without doubt—that it was indeed an accident for them that he was here. The series of maddening delays that had held him up between London and the Invalides presented itself to him with an air of prearrangement. The preposterous accusation, for instance, of the woman who had accosted him in Piccadilly, and the slow process of extricating himself at Marlborough Street. It was easy to hold a man up on some trumped-up charge till an important plan had matured.

Then there was the lavatory door at Waterloo, which had so ludicrously locked itself upon him. Being athletic, he had climbed over the partition, to find the attendant mysteriously absent. And, in Paris, was it by chance that he had had a deaf taxi driver, who mistook the direction "Quai d'Orléans" for "Gare de Lyon," and drove a mile and a half in the wrong direction before the shouts of his fare attracted his attention?

They were clever, the pursuers, and circumspect. They had accurate information; they would delay him, but without taking any overt step; they knew that, if only they could keep time on their side, they needed no other ally.

Did they know he was on the train? If not, he still kept the advantage, for they would travel in a false security, thinking him to be left, raging and helpless, in the Invalides. He decided to make a cautious reconnaissance.

The first step was to change his gray suit for another of inconspicuous navy-blue cloth, which he had in his small black bag. This he did in the privacy of the Men's Room, substituting for his gray soft hat a large traveling cap, which pulled well down over his eyes.

There was little difficulty in locating the man he was in search of. He found him seated in the inner corner of a first-class compartment, facing the engine, so that the watcher could approach unseen from behind. On the rack was a handsome

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dressing case, with the initials P.D.B.W. The young man was familiar with Wimsey's narrow, beaky face, flat yellow hair, and insolent dropped eyelids. He smiled a little grimly.

"He is confident," he thought, "and has regrettably made the mistake of underrating the enemy. Good! This is where I retire into a *seconde* and keep my eyes open. The next act of this melodrama will take place, I fancy, at Dreux."

It is a rule on the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest that all Paris-Evreux trains, whether of Grande Vitesse or what Lord Peter Wimsey preferred to call Grande Paresse, shall halt for an interminable period at Dreux. The young man (now in navy-blue) watched his quarry safely into the refreshment room, and slipped unobtrusively out of the station.

In a quarter of an hour he was back—this time in a heavy motoring coat, helmet, and goggles, at the wheel of a powerful hired Peugeot. Coming quietly onto the platform, he took up his station behind the wall of the *lampisterie,* where he could keep an eye on the train and the buffet door. After fifteen minutes his patience was rewarded by the sight of his man again boarding the express, dressing case in hand.

The porters slammed the doors, crying, "Next stop Verneuil!" The engine panted and groaned; the long train of gray-green carriages clanked slowly away. The motorist drew a breath of satisfaction, and, hurrying past the barrier, started up the car. He knew that he had a good eighty miles an hour under his hood, and there is no speed limit in France.

Mon Souci, the seat of that eccentric and eremitical genius the Comte de Rueil, is situated three kilometers from Verneuil. It is a sorrowful and decayed château, desolate at the termination of its neglected avenue of pines. The mournful state of a nobility without an allegiance surrounds it. The stone nymphs droop greenly over their dry and moldering fountains. An occasional peasant creaks with a single wagonload of wood along the ill-forested glades. It has the atmosphere of sunset at all hours of the day. The woodwork is dry and gaping for lack of paint. Through the jalousies one sees the prim *salon,* with its beautiful and faded furniture. Even the last of its ill-dressed, ill-favored women has withered away from Mon Souci, with her in-bred, exaggerated features and her long white gloves.

But at the rear of the château a chimney smokes incessantly. It is the furnace of the laboratory, the only living and modern thing among the old and dying; the only place tended and loved, petted and spoiled, heir to the long solicitude which Counts of a more light-hearted day had given to stable and kennel, portrait gallery and ballroom.

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And below, in the cool cellar, lie row upon row the dusty bottles, each an enchanged glass coffin in which the Sleeping Beauty of the vine grows ever more ravishing.

As the Peugeot came to a standstill in the courtyard, the driver observed with considerable surprise that he was not the Count's only visitor. An immense super-Renault, like a *merveilleuse* of the Directoire, all hood and no body, had been drawn so ostentatiously across the entrance as to embarrass the approach of any newcomer. Its glittering panels were embellished with a coat of arms, and the Count's elderly servant was at that moment staggering beneath the weight of two large and elaborate suitcases, bearing in silver letters that could be read a mile away the legend: LORD PETER WIMSEY.

The Peugeot driver gazed with astonishment at this display, and grinned sardonically. "Lord Peter seems rather ubiquitous in this country," he observed to himself. Then, taking pen and paper from his bag, he busied himself with a little letter writing.

By the time that the suitcases had been carried in, and the Renault had purred its smooth way to the outbuildings, the document was complete and enclosed in an envelope addressed to the Comte de Rueil. "The hoist with his own petard touch," said the young man, and, stepping up to the door, presented the envelope to the manservant.

"I am the bearer of a letter of introduction to Monsieur le Comte," he said. "Will you have the obligingness to present it to him? My name is Bredon—Death Bredon."

The man bowed, and begged him to enter.

"If monsieur will have the goodness to seat himself in the hall for a few moments. Monsieur le Comte is engaged with another gentleman, but I will lose no time in making monsieur's arrival known."

The young man sat down and waited. The windows of the hall looked out upon the entrance, and it was not long before the château's sleep was disturbed by the hooting of yet another motor horn. A station taxicab came noisily up the avenue. The man from the first-class carriage and the luggage labeled P.D.B.W. were deposited on the doorstep. Lord Peter Wimsey dismissed the driver and rang the bell.

"Now," said Mr. Bredon, "the fun is going to begin." He effaced himself as far as possible in the shadow of a tall *armoire normande*.

"Good evening," said the newcomer to the manservant, in admirable French, "I am Lord Peter Wimsey. I arrive upon the invitation of Monsieur le Comte de Rueil. Monsieur le Comte is at liberty?"

"Milord Peter Wimsey? Pardon, monsieur, but I do not understand. Milord de Wimsey is already arrived and is with Monsieur le Comte at this moment."

"You surprise me," said the other,

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with complete imperturbability, "for certainly no one but myself has any right to that name. It seems as though some person more ingenious than honest has had the bright idea of impersonating me."

The servant was clearly at a loss.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "monsieur can show his *papiers d'identité.*"

"Although it is somewhat unusual to produce one's credentials on the doorstep when paying a private visit," replied his lordship, with unaltered good humor, "I have not the slightest objection. Here is my passport, here is a *permis de séjour* granted to me in Paris, here my visiting card, and here a quantity of correspondence addressed to me at the Hôtel Meurice, Paris, at my flat in Piccadilly, London, at the Marlborough Club, London, and at my brother's house at King's Denver. Is that sufficiently in order?"

The servant perused the documents carefully, particularly impressed by the *permis de séjour.*

"It appears there is some mistake," he murmured dubiously. "If monsieur will follow me, I will acquaint Monsieur le Comte."

They disappeared through the folding doors at the back of the hall, and Bredon was left alone.

"Quite a little boom in Richmonds today," he observed, "each of us more unscrupulous than the last. The occasion obviously calls for a refined subtlety of method."

After what he judged to be a hectic ten minutes in the Count's library, the servant reappeared, searching for him.

"Monsieur le Comte's compliments, and would monsieur step this way?"

Bredon entered the room with a jaunty step. He had created for himself the mastery of this situation. The Count, a thin, elderly man, his fingers deeply stained with chemicals, sat, with a perturbed expression, at his desk. In two armchairs sat the two Wimseys.

Bredon noted that, while the Wimsey he had seen in the train (whom he mentally named Peter I) retained his unruffled smile, Peter II (he of the Renault) had the flushed and indignant air of an Englishman affronted. The two men were superficially alike—both fair, lean, and long-nosed, with the nondescript, inelastic face which predominates in any assembly of well-bred Anglo-Saxons.

"Mr. Bredon," said the Count, "I am charmed to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, and regret that I must at once call upon you for a service as singular as it is important. You have presented to me a letter of introduction from your cousin, Lord Peter Wimsey. Will you now be good enough to inform me which of these gentlemen he is?"

Bredon let his glance pass slowly from the one claimant to the other, meditating what answer would best

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serve his own ends. One, at any rate, of the men in this room was a formidable intellect, trained in the detection of imposture.

"Well?" said Peter II. "Are you going to acknowledge me, Bredon?"

Peter I extracted a cigarette from a silver case. "Your confederate does not seem very well up in his part," he remarked, with a quiet smile at Peter II.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Bredon, "I regret extremely that I cannot assist you in the matter. My acquaintance with my cousin, like your own, has been made and maintained entirely through correspondence on a subject of common interest. My profession," he added, "has made me unpopular with my family."

There was a very slight sigh of relief somewhere. The false Wimsey—whichever he was—had gained a respite. Bredon smiled.

"An excellent move, Mr. Bredon," said Peter I, "but it will hardly explain—allow me." He took the letter from the Count's hesitating hand. "It will hardly explain the fact that the ink of this letter of recommendation, dated three weeks ago, is even now scarcely dry—though I congratulate you on the very plausible imitation of my handwriting."

"If *you* can forge my handwriting," said Peter II, "so can this Mr. Bredon." He read the letter aloud over his double's shoulder.

" 'Monsieur le Comte—I have the honor to present to you my friend and cousin, Mr. Death Bredon, who, I understand, is to be traveling in your part of France next month. He is very anxious to view your interesting library. Although a journalist by profession, he really knows something about books.' I am delighted to learn for the first time that I have such a cousin. An interviewer's trick, I fancy. Monsieur le Comte. Fleet Street appears well informed about our family names. Possibly it is equally well informed about the object of my visit to Mon Souci?"

"If," said Bredon boldly, "you refer to the acquisition of the de Rueil formula for poison gas for the British Government, I can answer for my own knowledge, though possibly the rest of Fleet Street is less completely enlightened." He weighed his words carefully now, warned by his slip. The sharp eyes and detective ability of Peter II alarmed him far more than the caustic tongue of Peter I.

The Count uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Gentlemen," he said, "one thing is obvious—that there has been somewhere a disastrous leakage of information. Which of you is the Lord Peter Wimsey to whom I should entrust the formula I do not know. Both of you are supplied with papers of identity; both appear completely instructed in this matter; both of your handwritings correspond with the letters I have previously received from Lord Peter,

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and both of you have offered me the sum agreed upon in Bank of England notes.

"In addition, this third gentleman arrives endowed with an equal facility in handwritings, an introductory letter surrounded by most suspicious circumstances, and a degree of acquaintance with this whole matter which alarms me. I can see but one solution. All of you must remain here at the château while I send to England for some elucidation of this mystery. To the genuine Lord Peter I offer my apologies, and assure him that I will endeavor to make his stay as agreeable as possible. Will this satisfy you? It will? I am delighted to hear it. My servants will show you to your bedrooms, and dinner will be at half-past seven."

"It is delightful to think," said Mr. Bredon, as he fingered his glass and passed it before his nostrils with the air of a connoisseur, "that whichever of these gentlemen has the right to the name he assumes is assured tonight of a truly Olympian satisfaction." His impudence had returned to him, and he challenged the company with an air. "Your cellars, Monsieur le Comte, are as well known among men endowed with a palate as your talents among men of science. No eloquence could say more."

The two Lord Peters murmured assent.

"I am the more pleased by your commendation," said the Count, "that it suggests to me a little test which, with your kind cooperation, will, I think, assist us very much in determining which of you gentlemen is Lord Peter Wimsey and which his talented impersonator. Is it not matter of common notoriety that Lord Peter has a palate for wine almost unequaled in Europe?"

"You flatter me, Monsieur le Comte," said Peter II modestly.

"I wouldn't like to say unequaled," said Peter I, chiming in like a well-trained duet; "let's call it fair to middling. Less liable to misconstruction and all that."

"Your lordship does yourself an injustice," said Bredon, addressing both men with impartial deference. "The bet which you won from Mr. Frederick Arbuthnot at the Egotists' Club, when he challenged you to name the vintage years of seventeen wines blindfold, received its due prominence in the *Evening Wire*."

"I was in extra form that night," said Peter I.

"A fluke," laughed Peter II.

"The test I propose, gentlemen, is on similar lines," pursued the Count, "though somewhat less strenuous. There are six courses ordered for dinner tonight. With each we will drink a different wine, which my butler shall bring in with the label concealed. You shall each in turn give me your opinion upon the vintage. By this means we shall perhaps arrive at something, since

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the most brilliant forger—of whom I gather I have at least two at my table tonight—can scarcely forge a palate for wine. If too hazardous a mixture of wines should produce a temporary incommodity in the morning, you will, I feel sure, suffer it gladly this once in the cause of truth."

The two Wimseys bowed.

"*In vino veritas,*" said Mr. Bredon, with a laugh. He at least was well seasoned, and foresaw opportunities for himself.

"Accident, and my butler, having placed you at my right hand, monsieur," went on the Count, addressing Peter I, "I will ask you to begin by pronouncing, as accurately as may be, upon the wine which you have just drunk."

"That is scarcely a searching ordeal," said the other, with a smile. "I can say definitely that it is a very pleasant and well-matured Chablis Moutonne; and, since ten years is an excellent age for a Chablis—a real Chablis—I should vote for 1916, which was perhaps the best of the war vintages in that district."

"Have you anything to add to that opinion, monsieur?" inquired the Count deferentially of Peter II.

"I wouldn't like to be dogmatic to a year or so," said that gentleman critically, "but if I must commit myself, don't you know, I should say 1915—decidedly 1915."

The Count bowed, and turned to Bredon.

"Perhaps you, too, monsieur, would be interested to give an opinion," he suggested, with the exquisite courtesy always shown to the plain man in the society of experts.

"I'd rather not set a standard which I might not be able to live up to," replied Bredon a little maliciously. "I know that it is 1915, for I happened to see the label."

Peter II looked a little disconcerted.

"We will arrange matters better in future," said the Count. "Pardon me." He stepped apart for a few moments' conference with the butler, who presently advanced to remove the oysters and bring in the soup.

The next candidate for attention arrived swathed to the lip in damask.

"It is your turn to speak first, monsieur," said the Count to Peter II. "Permit me to offer you an olive to cleanse the palate. No haste, I beg. Even for the most excellent political ends, good wine must not be used with disrespect."

The rebuke was not unnecessary, for, after a preliminary sip, Peter II had taken a deep draft of the heady white richness. Under Peter I's quizzical eye he wilted quite visibly.

"It is—it is Sauterne," he began, and stopped. Then, gathering encouragement from Bredon's smile, he said, with more aplomb, "Château Yquem, 1911—ah! the queen of white wines, sir, as what's-his-name says." He drained his glass defiantly.

The Count's face was a study as

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he slowly detached his fascinated gaze from Peter II to fix it on Peter I.

"If I had to be impersonated by somebody," murmured the latter gently, "it would have been more flattering to have had it undertaken by a person to whom all white wines were *not* alike. Well, now, sir, this admirable vintage is, of course, a Montrachet of—let me see"—he rolled the wine delicately on his tongue—"of 1911. And a very attractive wine it is, though, with all due deference to yourself, Monsieur le Comte, I feel that it is perhaps slightly too sweet to occupy its present place in the menu. True, with this excellent *consommé marmite,* a sweetish wine is not altogether out of place, but, in my own humble opinion, it would have shown to better advantage with the *confitures.*"

"There, now," said Bredon innocently, "it just shows how one may be misled. Had not I had the advantage of Lord Peter's expert opinion—for certainly nobody who could mistake Montrachet for Sauterne has any claim to the name of Wimsey—I should have pronounced this to be, not the Montrachet-Aîné, but the Chevalier-Montrachet of the same year, which is a trifle sweeter. But no doubt, as your lordship says, drinking it with the soup has caused it to appear sweeter to me than it actually is."

The Count looked sharply at him, but made no comment.

"Have another olive," said Peter I kindly. "You can't judge wine if your mind is on other flavors."

"Thanks frightfully," said Bredon. "And that reminds me—" He launched into a rather pointless story about olives, which lasted out the soup and bridged the interval to the entrance of an exquisitely cooked sole.

The Count's eye followed the pale amber wine rather thoughtfully as it trilled into the glasses. Bredon raised his in the approved manner to his nostrils, and his face flushed a little. With the first sip he turned excitedly to his host.

"Good God, sir—"he began.

The lifted hand cautioned him to silence.

Peter I sipped, inhaled, sipped again, and his brows clouded. Peter II had by this time apparently abandoned his pretensions. He drank thirstily, with a beaming smile and a lessening hold upon reality.

"Eh bien, monsieur?" inquired the Count gently.

"This," said Peter I, "is certainly hock, and the noblest hock I have ever tasted, but I must admit that for the moment I cannot precisely place it."

"No?" said Bredon. His voice was like bean-honey now; sweet and harsh together. "Nor the other gentleman? And yet I fancy I could place it within a couple of miles, though it is a wine I had hardly looked to find in a French cellar at this time. It is hock, as your lordship says, and at that it is Johannis-

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berger. Not the plebeian cousin, but the *echter* Schloss Johannisberger from the castle vineyard itself. Your lordship must have missed it—to your great loss—during the war years. My father laid some down the year before he died, but it appears that the ducal cellars at Denver were less well furnished."

"I must set about remedying the omission," said the remaining Peter, with determination.

The *poulet* was served to the accompaniment of an argument over the Lafitte, his lordship placing it at 1878, Bredon maintaining it to be a relic of the glorious 'seventy-fives, slightly overmatured, but both agreeing as to its great age and noble pedigree.

As to the Clos-Vougeôt, on the other hand, there was complete agreement; after a tentative suggestion of 1915, it was pronounced finally by Peter I to belong to the equally admirable though slightly lighter 1911 crop. The *pré-salé* was removed amid general applause, and the dessert was brought in.

"Is it necessary," asked Peter I, with a slight smile in the direction of Peter II—now happily murmuring, "Damn good wine, damn good dinner, damn good show"—"is it necessary to prolong this farce any further?"

"Your lordship will not, surely, refuse to proceed with the discussion?" cried the Count.

"The point is sufficiently made, I fancy."

"But no one will surely ever refuse to discuss wine," said Bredon, "least of all your lordship, who is so great an authority."

"Not on this," said the other. "Frankly, it is a wine I do not care about. It is sweet and coarse, qualities that would damn any wine in the eyes—the mouth, rather—of a connoisseur. Did your excellent father have this laid down also, Mr. Bredon?"

Bredon shook his head.

"No," he said, "no. Genuine Imperial Tokay is beyond the opportunities of Grub Street, I fear. Though I agree with you that it is horribly overrated—with all due deference to yourself, Monsieur le Comte."

"In that case," said the Count, "we will pass at once to the liqueur. I admit that I had thought of puzzling these gentlemen with the local product, but, since one competitor seems to have scratched, it shall be brandy—the only fitting close to a good wine list."

In a slightly embarrassing silence the huge, round-bellied balloon glasses were set upon the table, and the few precious drops poured gently into each and set lightly swinging to release the bouquet.

"This," said Peter I, charmed again into amiability, "is, indeed, a wonderful old French brandy. Half a century old, I suppose."

"Your lordship's praise lacks warmth," replied Bredon. "This is *the* brandy—the brandy of brandies

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—the superb—the incomparable—the true Napoleon. It should be honored like the emperor it truly is."

He rose to his feet, his napkin in his hand.

"Sir," said the Count, turning to him, "I have on my right a most admirable judge of wine, but you are unique." He motioned to the butler, who solemnly brought forward the empty bottles, unswathed now, from the humble Chablis to the stately Napoleon, with the imperial seal blown in the glass. "Every time you have been correct as to growth and year. There cannot be six men in the world with such a palate as yours, and I thought that but one of them was an Englishman. Will you not favor us, this time, with your real name?"

"It doesn't matter what his name is," said Peter I. He rose. "Put up your hands, all of you. Count, the formula!"

Bredon's hands came up with a jerk, still clutching the napkin. The white folds spurted flame as his shot struck the other's revolver cleanly between trigger and barrel, exploding the charge, to the extreme detriment of the glass chandelier. Peter I stood shaking his paralyzed hand and cursing.

Bredon kept him covered while he cocked a wary eye at Peter II, who, his rosy visions scattered by the report, seemed struggling back to aggressiveness.

"Since the entertainment appears to be taking a lively turn," observed Bredon, "perhaps you would be so good, Count, as to search these gentlemen for further firearms. Thank you. Now, why should we not all sit down again and pass the bottle round?"

"You—*you* are—"growled Peter I.

"Oh, my name is Bredon all right," said the young man cheerfully. "I loathe aliases. Like another fellow's clothes, you know—never seem quite to fit. Peter Death Bredon Wimsey—a bit lengthy and all that, but handy when taken in installments. I've got a passport and all those things, too, but I didn't offer them, as their reputation here seems a little blown upon, so to speak.

"As regards the formula, I think I'd better give my personal check for it—all sorts of people seem able to go about flourishing Bank of England notes. Personally, I think all this secret diplomacy work is a mistake, but that's the War Office's pigeon. I suppose we all brought similar credentials. Yes, I thought so. Some bright person seems to have sold himself very successfully in two places at once. But you two must have been having a lively time, each of you thinking the other was me."

"My lord," said the Count heavily, "these two men are, or were, Englishmen, I suppose. I do not care to know what Governments have purchased their treachery. But where they stand, I, alas! stand too. To our

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venal and corrupt Republic I, as a Royalist, acknowledge no allegiance. But it is in my heart that I have agreed to sell my country to England because of my poverty. Go back to your War Office and say I will not give you the formula. If war should come between our countries —which may God avert!—I will be found on the side of France. That, my lord, is my last word."

Wimsey bowed.

"Sir," said he, "it appears that my mission has, after all, failed. I am glad of it. This trafficking in destruction is a dirty kind of business after all. Let us shut the door on these two, who are neither flesh nor fowl, and finish the brandy in the library."

CRIMINALIMERICKS

WHIMSICALITY *by D. R. BENSEN*

When feeling distracted and bored,
P. D. B.* Wimsey adored
Unravelin' a crime:
It eased for a time
The ennui of being a Lord.

*Peter Death Bredon, of course

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A tidy little tale which proves that even so innocent a pastime as the "coffee break" can be potentially dangerous . . .

THE ARITHMETIC OF POISON

by CHARLES A. PETERSON

IT WAS ODD IN A WAY, CLEM HARDY thought, as the radio in the police car continued to crackle with controlled urgency, that a call to action still had the power to create that stir of anticipation up his spine even after—how long was it now? —nearly twenty years in police work, ten of them in Homicide. The firehorse syndrome, Addie used to call it, laughing. The hunter instinct, their daughter Marian called it, with a seriousness that sometimes disturbed him.

Then, as the dispatcher's voice continued, Hardy's sense of mere awareness turned into one of apprehension. *Murder,* it had said; and now it added: *Seventh floor, Palmerston Building, Arlett, Swann and Company.*

Marian worked for Arlett and Swann.

Hardy glanced at his partner, young Frank Killian, and saw that he had registered the fact, too. With practiced ease Killian swung the unmarked car in a screeching U-turn, switched on the flasher and the siren, and headed down Montrose Street.

Hardy knew the young man who waited for them in the reception room. It was Stanley Tolliver, the straw-haired junior account executive who had dated Marian several times, displaying an old-fashioned sense of respect which Hardy approved of, along with a wide, engaging grin.

There was no grin today. They met almost as strangers.

"What is it, Stan?"

"My boss, Mr. Arlett." Stan was pale, his handshake cold and damp. He avoided looking directly at Hardy. "Mr. Swann says he was poisoned, but—" his brown eyes showed puzzlement—"I don't see how—it just can't be."

Hardy gave him a sharp look. "Is Marian mixed up in this?"

The young man sidestepped the question. "This way, sir," he said, guiding Hardy to an inner office. "As soon as it happened, Mr. Swann herded us all out of the room and locked both doors."

Hardy absorbed details as they walked. A reception lobby that contrived to blend warmth with a look of efficiency. Custom-built furniture. Gold-leaf letters on a cream wall, spelling out *Arlett, Swann & Co., Management Consultants.*

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Deep-pile carpeting of a russet shade.

Inside, about two dozen men and women sat or stood, all eyes turning to Hardy as he entered. All except Marian's. Hardy's search found her sitting off to one side, hands folded tightly in her lap. She lifted her head and saw him, and the expression in her eyes was like a physical blow. They were dark eyes, ordinarily luminous, but now blank with shock, staring out of a white, firm-chinned little face framed by soft waves of black hair.

It was the numb look of the hunted facing the hunter. A cold sensation gripped Hardy before his professional discipline reasserted itself.

A stooped, gray-haired man detached himself from the group. "I'm Herbert Swann," he said, acknowledging Stan's introduction. "The dead man was my partner. In here."

A door nearby was guarded by a small, sparely built man in his early fifties, with rimless eyeglasses and a thatch of dark brown hair. Swann introduced him as Milo Reynolds, comptroller of the firm. "As soon as I realized something was wrong," Swann explained, "I ordered everyone out of the room and locked it up. Milo has been watching the door ever since; Phil Prosser, our senior account executive, is at the other. We called Dr. Meredith—he's on the next floor—but Mike was dead before he could get here. This," Swann added, as he unlocked the door and they stepped into a large square room, "is our file room. We were having a full staff meeting. It's the only room that holds all of us comfortably."

The body of Michael Arlett lay half on its side, legs drawn up, between a worktable and a bank of filing cabinets. Beyond one outstretched hand a cardboard cup lay in a splotch of brown liquid. Hardy squatted, touched a finger to the liquid and sniffed it cautiously, then noted the fact of death as dispassionately as he noted the description of the deceased—a few inches under six feet, about 180 pounds, large well-kept hands, red hair, massive eyebrows, in his early or middle forties.

Hardy nodded to Killian. The medical examiner's team would arrive within minutes and Killian could take over those details. Rising and looking about, Hardy saw a small closet-like room about six feet square, opening off the file room.

"Our coffee room," Swann explained. "We keep a fifty-cup coffeemaker going in there all day. There's also a small refrigerator for cream and milk, and a washbowl and so on."

"That's where your partner's coffee came from?"

Swann nodded. His mouth twitched; his face was gray, lined with worry.

"What makes you so certain it was murder, Mr. Swann?"

"I had a younger brother who

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died of accidental poisoning. I did a lot of reading on the subject afterwards—morbid curiosity, I suppose. Anyway, I realized the moment Mike collapsed that he'd probably been poisoned. And, second, just before he died, Mike was about to say . . ."

"To say what?"

Swann hesitated again. "I guess I'll have to give you a bit of background, Lieutenant. As management consultants, we deal with extremely confidential information about our clients. Consequently, we're in the position of Caesar's wife—our reputation for keeping such information strictly confidential must remain above suspicion. Well, we've had a few incidents over the past year that have troubled us, but last week we lost our largest account as the result of an information leak that ruined some delicate merger plans. And that information could only have come out of this office. It was unquestionably bought and paid for by a competitor. Mike was determined to find the source of the leak—and I believe he had."

"Tell me exactly what happened."

"Mike called the entire staff together at ten o'clock, on just a few minutes' notice. When we'd gathered, he walked in, was given some coffee, and stood for a few minutes reviewing what had happened to the Wayne-Hadley account. Then he said something about the informant not getting away with it—that Mike had been doing some investigating and learned certain facts. All at once he got this peculiar expression on his face and doubled up with a cry of pain. It—it was over in a matter of seconds."

"Do you have any idea who he was going to name?"

Swann pulled himself together with a little shudder. He spoke reluctantly. "No—but wouldn't it seem that whoever gave him that coffee must be the guilty party?"

"Who gave it to him?"

"Marian Hardy."

Two hours later Frank Killian gave him a look compounded of equal parts of sympathy and exasperation. "You can't postpone the inevitable, Clem. And the longer you put it off, the harder Captain Bryan's going to nail your hide to the wall. You know you can't investigate a case impartially where your own daughter's the chief suspect—and you know the regulations!"

Hardy's reply was taut. "I know my daughter, Frank. I know Marian couldn't commit a calculated murder. And as one of the newer employees she's not likely to be involved in selling information."

"Sure, but—"

"Thanks to Swann's quick action in locking this room, the murderer has had no chance to cover up anything here. So the answer must be right in front of us, if we could only see it. I know it is! Just as I know that if I let this chance go by,

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Marian is going to be charged with a murder she didn't commit!"

Killian glared. They had pitched their voices low, so as not to be overheard by the others in the file room. The necessary photographs had been taken, the necessary preliminaries completed, and Arlett's body removed. The M.E. had given his tentative opinion that death was caused by cyanide introduced into Arlett's coffee.

Seven persons of the staff still remained for further questioning. Besides Herbert Swann and Marian, they were Lucy Sutton, Arlett's secretary; Reynolds the comptroller; files supervisor Miss Prinz; account executive Phil Prosser; and Stan Tolliver, who stood at Marian's side, alternately trying to reassure her and to look protective.

"Okay," said Killian. "But one of us is going to have to report to Bryan inside of ten minutes. I'd rather it were you."

Hardy expelled his breath in a long sigh. "All right," he said to the group, "let's go over it one more time."

A murmur of protest arose. Phil Prosser cried, "We've told you everything we know!"

"Over and over!" Milo Reynolds added. "And every minute you delay us is adding to our business problems—as though Mike's death weren't problem enough!"

"Besides," said Lucy Sutton, in a voice shrill with tension, "what more do you have to know? *She* poisoned Mike—we all saw her do it!"

Marian shrank back against Stan Tolliver. Her vulnerability stung Hardy like a whiplash. "I didn't kill him!" she burst out. "I had no reason! I—"

Swann interrupted. "Let the Lieutenant run his own business, Lucy. As far as ours is concerned—well, if this isn't cleaned up, and quickly, we may not have any business to worry about in a few weeks." His smile was mirthless. "Now just what do you want to know, Lieutenant?"

"How cyanide got into Arlett's coffee," Hardy said doggedly. "So let me recap. The coffee itself—"

"I made the coffee," said Miss Prinz, almost as if she were reciting. "We have a system whereby one group of girls makes coffee one week out of the month. It's my group's turn this week. I made one full pot the first thing this morning, and another when the first pot was nearly gone. Mr. Arlett never could stand stale coffee. He always drank more than anyone else. But," she concluded defiantly, "I didn't put any poison in the pot!"

"Twenty other people were drinking coffee from that same batch when Arlett died," said Killian, referring to his notebook.

"You say he was a heavy coffee drinker?" Hardy asked.

"It was an office joke," Swann said, "that you could trail Mike through the shop by the half-empty

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cups he left behind. He always had one in his hand."

"Now what about the cream?"

Phil Prosser answered. "I supplied the milk and cream. A couple of times a week I stop on my way to work and pick up a few cartons. That one was fresh this morning."

"Eleven others used cream from that carton," Killian said. "As far as we know, the last one to use it, before the dead man, was Mr. Tolliver."

"Sugar?" Hardy asked.

"We buy it in cartons of twenty-four one-pound boxes," said Lucy Sutton. "It's stored in the cabinet that the coffeemaker sits on."

"Twelve people had sugar from the box," said Killian, "It's hard to see how it could have been tampered with."

"The cups?"

Milo Reynolds stood up. "Just before Mr. Arlett came in, while we were all waiting, I noticed the dispenser was empty, so I opened a fresh package of cups and dropped them in. I took the first cup for myself."

Hardy had already noted that the slot on the dispenser indicated "Full," and a glance into the top had confirmed it. "Could the fresh package have been tampered with?" he demanded.

Reynolds shrugged. "The packages are sealed at the bottom. The idea is you break the seal and drop the whole stack into the dispenser without having to touch the cups at all. I distinctly remember breaking the seal."

Hardy fished the crumpled paper sleeve out of the wastebasket. One end was still intact, the other torn through the seal. He folded it over absently, frowning at the words showing the brand name and cup count, 50, as though by force of will he could make the paper give him a clue. "Then what happened?"

"As we said before," Phil Prosser stated wearily, "Mike came storming in to make his speech. He asked Marian to get him a cup of coffee. She did. He drank it. He died. I'm sure we all appreciate your feelings in this matter, Lieutenant, but those are the facts."

Hardy turned to his daughter. "Did you often get coffee for Mr. Arlett?"

She nodded. Her voice might have come to him through the mists of a nightmare. "Mr. Arlett said I always fixed the coffee just right for him."

Someone gave a nervous snicker. Hardy fought down a surge of fury, and found he was still shakily holding the paper sleeve, now crumpled into a ball. He was about to toss it away when he became aware that Milo Reynolds was talking, this time to Killian. It was almost as if the comptroller had already sensed a transfer of authority, a shift of initiative to the younger officer.

"Please!" he was saying. "If you've finished your investigation, can't we at least start cleaning up a

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bit? These old coffee cups—they've been standing around so long some are beginning to leak."

Killian glanced at Hardy. "I guess it's okay. The lab boys have everything they need—and we're past due for our report to headquarters. Go ahead, Mr. Reynolds." Then he gaped in surprise as Hardy sprang to stop the comptroller, who was heading toward the washbowl with a couple of paper cups.

"Just a moment, Mr. Reynolds!" Hardy said, his tone grim. "There's one more thing I'd like to check before you go in there."

Startled, the little man let one of the cups slip through his fingers. The contents splattered on the floor.

"First," said Hardy, "I want to count the cups left in the dispenser —*stop him, Frank!*"

"Count the cups?" Killian echoed, bewildered. He sucked a knuckle on his right hand, bruised in subduing Reynolds. "Why should he come unglued when you said you wanted to count the cups?"

"Because he knew we'd find fifty in the dispenser," Hardy said. He patted Marian's shoulder, noting with approval that she had stopped trembling at last. "But if his story were true, there should have been only forty-eight."

"I don't get it," said Killian.

Hardy smiled for the first time. "When I looked at the dispenser, the slot said 'Full'—that is, it contained fifty cups. But two cups had supposedly been used from the fresh package—Reynolds' and Arlett's."

"You mean with the dispenser full—with fifty cups in it now—there are two cups too many? That there must have been two cups still in the dispenser when Reynolds told the others it was empty?"

"Had to be—with the slot saying 'Full.' Reynolds was clever, all right. After making everyone think the dispenser was empty, he simply lifted the lid, dropped the cyanide into the top cup of the two still there, and then put in a new stack of fifty. He took the first cup, the bottom one, for himself—and the second, the deadly cup, was waiting for Arlett to ask for coffee."

"Wasn't Reynolds taking a long chance? Suppose someone else got the cup with the poison in it ahead of Arlett?"

"Reynolds knew the entire staff was already present, except for Arlett—so he could assume that anyone who wanted coffee already had it. It was practically certain that Arlett would ask for coffee before doing anything else. But if someone *did* get the poisoned cup ahead of Arlett, Reynolds could easily have intercepted it—bumping into the person, upsetting the cup accidentally."

"Still seems to me it was a gamble," Killian insisted.

"Sure—but he was desperate. He must have known that Arlett had the goods on him. It's even possible,

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I suppose, that he had gotten the cyanide for himself, but the dispenser setup gave him a chance to use it on Arlett. He didn't foresee that Marian would become involved, but that was a break for him. If he had only had the chance to take two more cups from the dispenser, we'd have been left with nothing to go on—not a clue."

He smiled at Marian, who tucked her arm into his and clung tightly for a long moment. "Let's go, baby. I think we can bend the regulations a little more and give you a lift home in an official car. Stan, too, if he wants to come."

He gave her a quick, affectionate squeeze as they walked out together.

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a *NEW* spy-and-counterspy story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

On a frozen waste near the Gulf of Finland an agent from the private intelligence organization known as SPAD was performing one of the most audacious acts conceivable in the world of espionage . . . a fascinating jigsaw puzzle—but Rand, the Double-C man, thought there were too many pieces to fit together . . .

This is the 10th Rand story; we hope you haven't missed the previous nine—they make one of the best series of spy short stories in current mystery fiction . . .

THE SPY WHO CLUTCHED A PLAYING CARD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

DURING FEBRUARY AND MARCH the Gulf of Finland was always icebound, and this winter proved to be no exception. The flat stretch of snow which covered the ice sparkled in the afternoon sun, broken only occasionally by the tracks of a passing patrol vehicle or the irregular trail of some winter creature.

Near one shore, in an area where man rarely ventured during these frozen months, a single frost-crusted truck rested silently on great balloon snow tires. At the back of the truck a man dressed in white worked at a sort of drill that was boring through the snow and frozen earth toward some unseen goal. He worked quickly in the cold, glancing now and then at the distant white horizon as if fearing interruption.

Finally, deciding somehow that he was nearing his goal, he slowed the drill and carefully withdrew it from the hole. From the rear of the truck he pulled a coil of wire and some insulated tools. He was stooping over the hole, intent on his work, when the single shot came, a flat echoing sound that swept quickly over the terraces of snow and then was gone.

No other sound followed, and there was nothing to confirm its passing, except that the figure in white no longer worked by his

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truck. Now he was crumpled to the ground, and already the shifting snow—like desert sand or lazy waves—was beginning to lap and pull at his body . . .

Hastings had phoned Rand just after nine, asking him to see a certain Mr. Greene from Washington. When the visitor entered the office of Concealed Communications a half hour later, Rand needed only a single glance to know that the man was from the C.I.A. He hoped that the Americans were a bit more circumspect in their choice of agents for other countries. Rand had never yet met one in London who didn't seem to shout his profession with all the reticence of a screeching peacock.

Mr. Greene was no exception. Tall, angular, vaguely handsome—the sort who'd gone through college on the debating team and worked out Saturday afternoons in the school gym. He'd be married with three children, because that was the proper number to have these days, and his wife wouldn't object to his work because on this level it was no more risky than selling insurance.

"You're Rand," he said, holding out his hand. "They think very highly of your work in Washington."

"I'm pleased to hear that," Rand said, not believing a word of it. The man obviously wanted a favor.

"We've had an odd sort of report from the Scandinavian area. Washington thought that in the interests of time you might be able to give us some help at this end."

Rand smiled slightly and offered the man a cigarette. "Anything I can do . . ."

"A man named Alfred Penny was killed two days ago near the Gulf of Finland. He was shot by a high-powered rifle from some distance away."

"Alfred Penny? I don't know the name."

"He's had many names—Glaz, Blanco, Marrigal, to name a few. He was a specialist, an expert in all sorts of electronic listening devices, telephone taps, things like that."

"An expert for whom—the Russians or our side?"

Greene leaned back in his chair. "Neither side, surprisingly. He was a British subject, originally—which is one of the reasons we're getting you into it—but for the past five years he's worked for an organization called SPAD. Ever hear of them?"

"Of course," Rand replied. SPAD was a private intelligence organization headquartered in Paris and West Berlin, named after a popular French fighter plane of the First World War. Supposedly working for the West, it had been accused on occasion of supplying information to the highest bidder—East or West.

"We don't know who killed him, but we do know what he was up to out there. He was tapping into the

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hot line between Washington and Moscow."

"What!" Rand came forward in his chair. "Why in hell would he be doing that?"

Greene shrugged. "We're questioning SPAD about that right now. They claim his mission wasn't authorized, but we're not so certain."

Rand was frowning at the ceiling. "But what would he gain by tapping into the hot line? The thing is never used. It's for the ultimate emergency. The day the hot line has to be used, people like Penny and the rest of us will be beyond caring."

"Are you familiar with its operation, Mr. Rand? The hot line is not a voice connection as so many people seem to believe. It's a teletype, actually, with a one-time tape system to encipher messages."

Rand nodded. The one-time system had been perfected in 1918 by an officer of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. It used a teletypewriter tape perforated with a patternless, nonrepetitive series of holes to add electrical pulses to the plaintext message. Decipherment was absolutely impossible unless the receiver had an identical tape at his end. After being used once, that section of tape was destroyed. Germany had used the system in the 1920s, and Russia in the 1930s, but the necessity for having a disposable tape as lengthy as the messages prevented its universal use, especially on battlefields. A few Russian agents like Rudolf Abel and the Krogers had used variations of the one-time system, and it was presently well-regarded by the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and a number of other groups. Since both the U.S. State Department and the Russian government were users, it was a natural selection for the hot line link.

"So even if Penny tapped the line, he couldn't decipher it," Rand observed. "He'd be listening to a line that carried no messages, and he couldn't have understood them if it had. So why did he try to do it?"

Greene shrugged again. "I thought you might have some ideas, being the head of Double-C. Though actually that was only one reason for my visit. When they noticed something amiss with the line and went to investigate, they found Penny's body. He had a list of names on him."

"Foolish!" Rand snorted.

"Not so foolish. They were apparently a list of contacts. The list was hidden in the heel of his boot."

"Do people still do that sort of thing?" Rand marveled.

"They do. Here's the list."

He passed Rand a folded slip of paper. It was headed, *London,* and there followed three names: *Geoffrey Crayon, Hal Whitehood, Leo Vandor.*

"Interesting," Rand commented. "A list of contacts, you think?"

"What else?"

"Well, I can think of a number

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of things. For instance, perhaps Penny's killer planted the list on his body."

"No chance. As near as we can tell from the footprints, the killer went nowhere near the body. We mainly wanted your help with these names—any chance they're not what they seem? Of course Vandor is the Red spy awaiting trial, and Whitehood is the well-known movie star, but what about Crayon? The only one I know is in Washington Irving."

Rand smiled at the man. "I didn't realize the C.I.A. was so literary. Oh, I doubt very much that this is the Geoffrey Crayon of *The Sketch Book*, despite the fact that the book first appeared in London. No, I rather think that this is Geoffrey Crayon, the contract bridge expert. He plays often in tournaments around London, and he writes a weekly column in the *Express*."

"Could any of these people be linked to an organization like SPAD?"

"Well, Leo Vandor is a known agent. I suppose he'd be the most likely."

Greene frowned out the window, where the winter sun was making one of its too-brief appearances. "Since this is primarily a communications matter, and could possibly involve the use of cipher, we were wondering if you could talk to these three men—question them about Alfred Penny."

"I'd be glad to," Rand replied. "But you don't usually learn much from spies by formal questioning."

"You don't learn much, but you just might force the hand of one of them."

"If there's a hand to be forced," Rand observed. "If the whole thing isn't just a coverup for something bigger."

"What could be bigger than the hot line?"

It was Rand's turn to stare out the window. "I don't know. I wish I did know sometimes what the other side's thinking."

When Rand went to see Whitehood the following morning, he took Parkinson with him. Parkinson was the youngest and most promising of Rand's half dozen assistants in Double-C—a sandy-haired cipher expert just three years out of Cambridge, who always called his superior "sir."

"Have you seen any of Whitehood's films, Parkinson?" Rand asked while they waited in the studio's reception room for the actor to appear.

"Those spy things, sir. They're really wild—wilder than the Bonds!"

"Do you think he could possibly be living his role off the screen?"

"I hope not, sir—not a woman in London would be safe!"

When he finally appeared, Whitehood was brisk and bristling. He looked much like the press release photos which Rand had studied, ex-

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cept that the boyish smile was nowhere in evidence. "Make it fast," he said. "I'm due back on the set."

Rand introduced them and said, "This matter concerns a man named Alfred Penny, who lived here in London for a number of years. Did you know him?"

"Never heard the name." The actor was impatient, restless in his chair. "Is that all?"

"He died recently. Your name was found on the body."

"Perhaps he was a fan," Whitehood said with an unconcerned shrug.

"I doubt that very much."

"Well, I don't know your Mr. Penny, and I really have no further time to spend with you."

"Just one more question," Rand said, "and then we'll let you go. Are you familiar with SPAD?"

"Who?"

"S-P-A-D."

"Airplane, wasn't it?" the actor said, but Rand thought he caught a fleeting spark of something—fear?—in the man's eyes.

"I think that's all for now," Rand said, getting to his feet. "Thank you for seeing us."

"Always glad to help the government," Whitehood said, and disappeared quickly through swinging doors.

When they were outside, Parkinson asked, "What do you think, sir? Was he telling the truth?"

"I don't know. I don't even know what Greene expected me to find." Rand bit pensively at his lower lip for a moment and then took out a pack of American cigarettes. "Look, call ahead and see if we can talk with Leo Vandor. He had to be in court for his arraignment this morning, and they weren't certain what time he'd be back in his cell."

Rand stood by the car, smoking his cigarette, marveling at the second straight day of winter sunshine. The temperature was still a frosty 35, but he thought it might warm up by afternoon.

Parkinson came running from the corner phone booth a moment later, his face flushed with excitement. Rand's heart skipped a beat and he threw away the cigarette. "What is it, Parkinson?"

"Vandor, sir! He's escaped—broke away from the guards while they were taking him to court!"

Leo Vandor had been arrested just before Christmas for violating the Official Secrets Act. Although the actual details of his espionage had only been vaguely reported thus far in the public press, Rand knew the outline of the case quite well. Vandor was an East European who'd come to England ten years earlier as a refugee from the Russians. He'd lived a quiet life as the managing editor of a small-circulation poetry magazine, apparently acting as a Russian agent during all this time.

His technique for receiving and passing on secrets was simplicity it-

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self. Russian agents in the United States and other countries submitted poems to Vandor's magazine—poems with intricate messages hidden in the text, by cipher or microdot. These poems were "rejected" by Vandor, who simply put them in return envelopes addressed to cover addresses behind the Iron Curtain. Even if a mail check was being maintained, it showed only that certain people in both the United States and Russia submitted manuscripts to the same poetry magazine in London.

But the method had finally been detected, and somehow American and British counterintelligence agents had been tipped off. Vandor was arrested, and in his possession at the time they found a mass of figures that translated into the orbits of a number of supersecret American satellites.

"And now he's escaped," Parkinson said.

Rand had a rare twinge of uncertainty. It was hard to believe that Vandor's escape was tied into the death of Penny, and yet . . . He got on the phone and spoke briefly with Hastings, arranging another meeting with Greene, the C.I.A. man. Then he rejoined Parkinson.

"There's a third name on that list," he said grimly. "I think we'd better pay a fast visit to Mr. Geoffrey Crayon, the contract bridge expert."

Crayon lived high above the London streets in one of the tallest and newest of urban apartment buildings. There were two stone lions by the front door, but once inside everything was chrome and glass, including the silent elevator that lifted them toward the top-floor penthouse.

Rand pushed the buzzer and waited. Presently a peephole opened in the massive oak door and a voice said, "Yes. State your business."

"I'm Rand, Department of Concealed Communications. Here's my identification. We'd like a word with you, sir—that is, if you're Geoffrey Crayon."

"I'm Crayon."

"Would you open the door, please?"

"What's it about?"

"It's a matter of national security."

"I'll be with you in a moment."

They stood waiting, and nothing happened. After a few moments Rand pushed the buzzer again. Still there was nothing. "Is there a back way out of here, Parkinson?"

"Just those stairs by the elevator, I'd imagine, sir. He didn't go down those."

"Think we can break down this door?"

"It's oak, sir."

Rand's heart was beating faster. "I'm afraid something's wrong."

"Maybe he's getting dressed."

The elevator doors slid open and a uniformed bobby emerged. "What's going on here?" he asked.

Rand flashed his identification. "We're trying to see Mr. Crayon, officer."

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"That so? Well, you'd better come downstairs with me, then. Mr. Crayon just leaped to his death from the penthouse terrace."

It was after dark, but Rand was still in his little office overlooking the Thames, sitting with a cold cup of coffee and a copy of the late evening paper. The story had made a stop-press box on page one, beneath a headline which read: *Bridge Expert Dies Clutching Ten of Clubs.*

Rand tossed the paper aside as the C.I.A. man entered the office. "You've had a busy day," Greene said, sitting in the same chair he'd occupied before.

"Yes, I have. I was planning to see three people. The actor knew nothing, the spy escaped from custody, and the bridge expert committed suicide. I'd say I scored an absolute zero."

"No, no, not at all. At least you started things moving. What about Crayon? Any chance he was murdered?"

Rand shook his head. "None whatsoever. He thought we were coming to arrest him and he took the quickest way out. But what interests me is that on the way to his death he paused long enough to go through a deck of cards and select a ten of clubs to clutch in his hand."

"Interesting," Greene admitted. "Any idea why?"

"A message of some sort. But what? And to whom?"

The C.I.A. man shifted in his chair. "I have someone who may be able to help us there. We're holding a woman who was Alfred Penny's mistress. Want to see her?"

Rand hesitated, but only for a moment. He had the feeling he was already into this thing more deeply than he should be, more deeply than his official position called for. Still, something was afoot, and it might be crucial.

"All right," he agreed. "Let's go."

Her name was Marsha Mills, and she might have been a fashion model in her sleek miniskirt that seemed all wavy lines and garish colors; the sleeveless style of her blouse revealed a bruised right shoulder. Rand hadn't believed that girls really dressed like that, even in London. He'd preferred to view the entire thing as some wishful fantasy on the part of the fashion industry.

But here was one in the flesh, who sat with crossed knees, was nonchalantly smoking a cigarette, and telling them she was a schoolteacher.

"A progressive girls' school, you know."

"Of course," Rand said.

"And I can't understand why this man—" a motion toward Greene, "should hold me here. Am I under arrest or something?"

The place was a little office on Lower Thames Street, not far from the Billingsgate Market, in an area of the city hardly expected to harbor the London headquarters of the C.I.A. Greene was present, and so

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was another man who didn't speak. They were obviously waiting for Marsha Mills to start talking, and she knew it.

"You're not under arrest," Greene told her. "We just want you to tell us about Alfred Penny."

"I haven't seen him in months."

The C.I.A. man smiled. "Correction. You flew to Finland with him just last week. And when he was killed a few days ago you were registered at the New Helsinki Hotel as Mrs. Alfred Penny. Does that refresh your memory?"

She stubbed out her cigarette and avoided their eyes. "What do you want to know? Can we work out a deal?"

"Maybe. Tell us why he went there," Greene prodded.

"I don't know."

"Was it a mission for SPAD?"

"Who?"

"I don't think you're really trying, Miss Mills. You can end up in a lot of trouble, you know."

She seemed to decide then. "All right, I'll give it to you straight, if you'll just let me go. A deal?"

"A deal."

"Alfred was one of the top men in SPAD—I don't have to tell you about them. He had access to more inside information about double agents than many of you people. A while back, he decided to strike out on his own. He had some big scheme that involved the flight to Finland and then contacting three men in London."

Rand was now interested. "Who were the three men?" he asked.

"I don't know their names. One was Russian, one British, and the third was a SPAD man. Alfred was going to offer them something, and make a huge amount of money."

"You mean he would sell something to the highest bidder?"

"I don't know the details."

"Did he tell anyone else he was going to Finland?"

"No. No one. I'm sure of that."

Greene took Rand aside and asked, "What do you think?"

"She was much too willing to talk. But you can't hold her. I suggest releasing her and watching where she goes. It just might prove interesting."

"All right," the American agreed.

They left the little office after Greene had given quick instructions to the other man. In the car back to Rand's building Greene said, "At least it tells us something, since we have those three names. We know Vandor is the Russian, and Crayon couldn't have been the British agent or he wouldn't have killed himself when you came to question him."

Rand agreed. "So Crayon was the man from SPAD, and that leaves Whitehood as our own man. I'll check for confirmation."

"It doesn't explain why Crayon killed himself clutching a playing card."

"I have an idea about that," Rand said.

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"A code of some sort?"

"More in the nature of a dying message, I think. An improvised code."

"Directed to SPAD?"

"Possibly," Rand said. But the whole thing bothered him. There were too many pieces in the puzzle—three separate espionage organizations, a murder, a suicide, an escape, a dying message. Too many pieces.

Back in his office, Rand tried unsuccessfully to reach Hastings in Internal Security. Finally he coded a quick message that read: *Urgent know if Whitehood is our own man.* He sealed it in an envelope and gave it to young Parkinson. "Find Hastings and get me a quick answer on this," he said.

"Where will you be, sir?"

"I'm going back to see Whitehood again. He's the only one of the three that's left."

This time the actor seemed more friendly and willing to talk. He sat in a relaxed posture against a vivid green sofa and said, "It's good to see you again, Mr. Rand. I am sorry if I appeared a bit brisk earlier. We were filming, you know. I'm always more relaxed here in my apartment."

Rand gave him a smile, trying to match the open friendliness. "It's about Alfred Penny again, I'm afraid. Since I saw you last, there've been some rather startling developments. A Russian spy named Vandor has escaped from custody, and a man named Crayon has committed suicide."

"Should I know either of them?" he asked blandly.

"Their names were with yours on Alfred Penny's body."

"Oh?"

Rand decided to wait no longer. "Look, Whitehood, I have reason to believe we're on the same side in this thing. I've asked for official confirmation that you're one of us. So let's not beat about the bush."

"What do you want to know?"

"That's more like it." Rand paused, then hurried on, feeling more sure of himself. "The man named Crayon died clutching a playing card—ten of clubs. Mean anything to you?"

The actor shrugged. "In some fortunetelling systems it means gambling. Perhaps this Crayon frequented the gambling clubs around London."

"A possibility," Rand agreed. And one he hadn't thought of. "But I look at it this way. Crayon wasn't just anybody—he was a well-known contract bridge expert. In his final moment of life, if he had to get a message to his people—to SPAD, for instance—he would realize that a playing card clutched in his hand would certainly make news. As it happened, the papers headlined the fact. Somewhere, someone noted that fact and read the message."

The telephone buzzed and Whitehood answered it. He listened for a

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moment, then passed it to Rand. "It's for you."

"Rand here."

"This is Parkinson, sir. I have the reply from Hastings."

"Good. You can give it to me clear, but no names."

"Hastings says he's not one of us, sir."

"What?" Rand wasn't sure he'd heard correctly.

"He's not ours, sir. They think he's SPAD."

Rand hung up the phone and turned to face the pistol held firmly in Whitehood's hand.

"You want to hear about it?" Whitehood asked. "All right, I'll tell you the whole thing." He smiled slightly. "Before I kill you, that is."

"You're SPAD, of course."

"Of course. I was Penny's partner until he got this crazy scheme and struck out on his own."

"Then Crayon was the Russian. And Vandor—"

"Vandor is a British double agent. He was allowed to escape. Penny and I uncovered the fact quite by accident. It was Vandor himself who tipped off the British to raid his own office and find the information on the American space satellites. And that of course is the key to the whole filthy business."

"How?"

"The Americans have launched several satellites from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. These satellites, in the Discoverer, Samos, Midas, and Vela Hotel series, are designed to detect nuclear explosions and rocket launches. The satellite launches are usually reported, without detail, in the public press—but the exact mission of each satellite is highly classified."

"So?"

"Last year the Americans launched a new satellite with a superior television eye. It can detect anything on the ground even through clouds. The Russians have obtained the orbits of all current satellites, but they do not know which one carries the powerful new lens."

"What good would it do if they did know?"

"They could move or hide their secret equipment when they knew that particular satellite is passing overhead. Because of the rotation of the earth, it passes over the same spot only twice a month."

"So they needed to know—what?"

"A date, only a date. The date that satellite was launched by the Americans. When they know which one it is, they will then know its orbit."

"The information was sent to Vandor?"

"Yes, but of course he was a British agent. Unfortunately, it was also sent to Geoffrey Crayon of SPAD—I believe it was passed to him during a bridge game."

"So the ten of clubs must stand for a date. The tenth of some month?"

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"Whatever it is, the Russians have it by now."

"*If* they correctly read the message of the card."

Whitehood steadied the pistol in his hand. "I'll let the Russians worry about that. I've talked too much already."

"Why do you think you have to kill me?"

"Because I'm taking over where Penny left off. I might even take over with his mistress, too. I can't have you or the C.I.A. holding me in London while you try to solve this satellite thing."

"Did you kill Penny?"

"Of course not. But since he's dead, I can't let the chance to get all that money go to waste. Goodbye, Mr. Rand." And his finger tightened on the trigger.

"Wait! At least you can tell me what Penny was up to out there. Why was he tapping the hot line?"

Whitehood smiled. "You really don't know, do you?"

"No."

"He wasn't going to intercept messages. He was going to send his own. He was going to use the hot line as an exclusive espionage reporting service directly to the heads of state in Washington or Moscow—whichever would pay more. With his contacts from SPAD he would have a foolproof system—no middlemen, no chance of the messages going astray."

"That's fantastic! No government would agree to it."

"More fantastic than satellites in the sky? More fantastic than double agents like Vandor? I think not, Mr. Rand. In fact, I am going to try it myself."

It was then that young Parkinson came crashing through the window behind Whitehood. He landed on the spy's back and toppled him to the floor just as the gun exploded. Then, gasping, bleeding from glass cuts, he looked up and said, "I thought you might need some help, sir."

Just before dawn the next morning Rand found himself shaking hands with Leo Vandor at a Thames River dock. The C.I.A. man was there, too, and Hastings from Internal Security. Vandor was a big man who looked exactly like his pictures.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Rand," he said. "Even the Russians speak highly of you."

"I'm the one who should be pleased," Rand said. "You're slipping back behind the Curtain?"

"Of course. That is my job."

"If SPAD knows you're on our side, the Russians might know it too."

The tall man only shrugged. "That is the chance I have always taken."

Greene shifted his feet. "We must know if the Russians correctly read the message of the playing card. If so, the satellite with the special lens is useless."

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Vandor smiled slightly. "I understand Mr. Rand has deduced the card's meaning."

Rand nodded absently. He'd explained it all a half dozen times already that night. "The date of a satellite launching last year from Vandenberg Air Force Base. Well, it's doubtful if they ever launch more than one satellite a week, so all Crayon really had to convey was the week that particular satellite went up. Now, there's one thing a deck of cards has in common with the calendar year—52 cards, 52 weeks. And in contract bridge the 52 cards have a specific rank—four suits, the highest spades, the lowest clubs. In order of rank you start with the ace of spades and go down to the two; then the same with hearts, diamonds, and clubs in that order. The ace of spades, therefore, is card number one in the deck, making the two of clubs card number 52."

"Making the ten of clubs card number 44," Greene said.

Rand nodded. "Last year, the 44th week was the week of October 30th. And that's when the special satellite went up."

"Do you think the Russians got the message?"

"If I figured it out, I'm sure they did too," Rand said.

Vandor shook hands once more. "My launch is waiting. I must say goodbye."

Rand watched him go, thinking that he might be seeing the last of a very brave man. Then, as he went back through the dawn mist to the warmth of the waiting car, he heard Greene say, "We still don't know who killed Alfred Penny at the beginning of this whole affair. Was it SPAD or the Russians or who?"

Rand settled back in the seat as the car started. "I doubt if any of them would have bothered. Why kill a man bent on such a foolish mission? Besides, no one knew he was there."

"But someone did kill him!" Greene insisted.

"I think it's out of our territory," Rand said. "I think the motive was private rather than political. It's no sort of evidence, but you might have noticed that Marsha Mills had a bruised right shoulder—the kind of bruise the recoil of a high-powered rifle might leave. She was in Helsinki with him, and it wouldn't be the first time a woman killed her lover."

Green's mouth dropped open. "I never thought of that."

Rand smiled and closed his eyes. It had been a long day, and a long night.

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This story is a reprint. It first appeared in the January 12, 1967 issue of "The Reporter." We only wish it had been originally submitted to EQMM so that we could have published it as a new story . . .

"The Thief" is a marvelously sensitive story, poetically conceived and poetically written, with a sort of "New England chorus" of illuminating comments by Mrs. Marvell's around-the-corner neighbor, Josephine Hooker. This distinguished story will clutch at your memory long after most stories have lost their grip . . .

THE THIEF

by HELEN HUDSON

MRS. MARVELL SAT AT THE KITCHEN table, steaming her nose inside the coffee cup, watching the birds in her feeder and getting quite worked up over the jay. She had a strong sense of law and order and a devotion to detail. Her iced-tea spoons were exquisite and her diet balanced. She was 68 with blue eyes and a fragile little face, round as a cup and beautifully preserved, as though it had been wrapped in tissue and used only on special occasions.

She still saved ribbon and paper and rubbed her furniture with lemon-oil polish to preserve the wood. She wore her glasses on a chain around her neck like a second pair of eyes on her bosom ("Too vain to put them where they belong," Josephine Hooker had said), and kept two appointment books, one upstairs, one down, thus keeping a double check on time, though most of the pages were blank.

Through the windows she could see the sandbox and the swing and the jungle gym next door where Margaret Witherspoon's roses had once waved little white gloves over the fence. On the other side, at the old Brewster place, the flowerbeds were sinking into a sea of grass and an empty washline swayed in the breeze. Her own garden was neat as ever, with rows of tulips at the back and petunias on their knees along the borders.

She watched the jay swoop down on the feeder, scattering the sparrows and the chickadees, a plump, arrogant fellow in a blue suit. He reminded her of the policeman who had filled her kitchen after the last robbery, a big clumsy man whose hands stumbled and tripped among her china. They had been increasing steadily, these robberies, ever since Lewis went to the nursing home.

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They were not really robberies, though, since nothing ever seemed to be taken—nothing, that is, that she missed. And they never happened when she was home. But they were beginning to frighten her all the same, and she was very careful now about locking up—double bolts on all the doors, curtains open, lights on, and the burglar alarm switched up. She was thinking of getting a dog and an electric fence.

"It's just a bunch of kids, Amy," Josephine Hooker told her. "After your liquor. I can't think why you don't leave it out where they can get at it easily. It would be cheaper in the long run." She rubbed her nose with the back of her hand like a child who won't carry a handkerchief, though she was 65 and born to one of the oldest families in Newburyport, Massachusetts. She had read so much poetry through the years that her face had begun to resemble a page of free verse, all dots and dashes and irregular lines.

Mrs. Marvell shook her head carefully as though she still had a mass of blonde curls on her neck. "They're after my *things*, of course," she said. "That's why they always choose *my* house. I have *lovely* things." And she thought of her fine old silver bundled in its flannel jackets and the china and the pair of Venetian-glass decanters she kept clean and empty on the sideboard.

She pushed the coaster under Josephine's highball and stirred her own tea. "The liquor will stay where it belongs," she said firmly. But she didn't expect Josephine to understand. For Josephine kept extra hairpins in an ashtray on the mantel and pencils in mayonnaise jars all over the living room. Her hair always looked as if it were about to slide down over one ear like a wig, though she kept it skewered on dozens of pins and bunched up under a net. Mrs. Marvell's hair, all white now, stood up in soft little wisps as though she were being constantly—and gently—fanned.

Yet it seemed only a few years ago that her hair was still bright and shiny as the day Lewis first saw it from the lecture platform, like a golden spray in that sea of bent heads. He had married her at the end of the term, taking her home to a large white house with a driveway that swept past the front door and a grape arbor and a birdbath behind, and Valerie to cook and clean and draw the curtains so Mrs. Marvell never had to see the end of a day or the coming of night, dripping silently through the trees.

Lewis was an associate professor by then, with tenure stretched out comfortably beneath him and an adoring family high on Nob Hill, a continent away. He was a mild, courteous man with a hint of the cutaway about him: a conciliator, a moderator, much in demand at college debates and faculty meetings. He brought to his new wife the love he had been saving up for years,

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like water in a bowl, and rubbed the back of her neck with tender hands. But he went on living most of his life in his study at home and in his office at the college, with the long walk between for exercise and reflection. Josephine Hooker said he was the only married bachelor she had ever known.

But Mrs. Marvell just smiled and ran a finger down the smooth silver curve of her teapot. She had her Wednesday reading group and the Sunday art lectures and long naps when she was bored. Sometimes she put a piece of black-velvet ribbon in her hair and went out to lunch. But on the whole she preferred her garden, where the demands were simple and the responses predictable.

Occasionally she gave dinner parties for six or eight with two maids to serve. "She really does it for her things," Josephine Hooker said. "To lay a new tablecloth or light up her Cellini candlesticks."

But Mrs. Marvell had been content. Her days had opened and closed like paper fans without even the pain of childbirth to cause the tiniest tear. And only Lewis to say, in his mildest manner, "I don't believe I would, if I were you, Amy. I really don't."

"Oh, I was spoiled," Mrs. Marvell thought now, sitting alone at her kitchen table with the jungle gym on her right and an old rope swinging slightly at her left and that fat jay lording it over her feeder. "Terribly, terribly spoiled." She stared into the empty coffee cup and sucked one end of her glasses.

Yet even away back then, the robberies had begun. The first one came about a year after her marriage. Lewis had just left for a conference. "Do come," he had said the night before. But she had an appointment with her garden man the next day and she hated trains and cigarette smoke and Lewis' middle-aged, academic friends, who gave her admiring smiles but kept the conversation to themselves. She much preferred to stay behind and watch Douglas Fairbanks, strong and silent in the dark, and wait for Lewis to come back with his memories of Chicago strung on a chain or a locket for her.

But when she got home that night, for the first time, standing all alone, outside the dark and silent house, she suddenly felt frightened. And when she stepped inside, she had the strange feeling that someone had been there—someone who did not belong. She stood just inside the back door with the feeling that he was standing right behind her. She could almost feel his breath on her neck.

She saw a burnt matchstick in the little enamel ashtray, a dishcloth in a heap on the counter beneath the rack, and the liquor cabinet slightly open. She turned and ran around the corner to where Josephine Hooker lived with Alden, her new husband, who did all the cooking while his wife read poetry aloud.

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Josephine put her arms around her and Mrs. Marvell sobbed into the wool on Josephine's shoulder that still smelled of camphor though it was mid-January. "Stay here tonight," Josephine said. But Mrs. Marvell remembered that the Hookers had no real guest room, just a lumpy cot in Alden's study with Alden's music stand at the head and Alden's swivel chair at the foot and smudges on the spread where Alden's feet had been.

The Hookers took her back home and saw her inside. She left most of the lights on and put chairs behind the doors. But she lay awake a long time, wondering about him, whoever he was, who had watched the house so carefully, whose fingers had violated her possessions, and who even now, she felt sure, was still out there, beneath the trees or under the arbor, with his hands restless in his pockets and his eyes fixed on her windows.

Lewis came home the next morning. The police came; also a carpenter in overalls, looking ready to cope, with a hammer and a rule sticking out of his back pocket. They examined the locks and the windows and the doors. They searched the cupboards and the closets. But they found nothing gone and nothing added.

Lewis put his arms around her. "Are you sure you didn't just imagine it?"

"He must have had a key," she said.

The liquor cabinet was closed, the dishcloth hung up, and the ashtray washed. They had new locks put on all the doors. The days became smooth again with Rowena, this time, closing the curtains and Lewis pouring the tea and carving. There was nothing to remember except, for a while, a small hole, a jagged slit where something ugly had forced its way in.

Mrs. Marvell had forgotten all about it when, three years later, Lewis had to go West to his mother's funeral. "I really think you should come with me this time, Amy," he said. She was in bed with a headache and symptoms that might have meant the early stages of pregnancy.

She held out her hand. "I'm so sorry. I know I shouldn't let you go alone. But I'm afraid to take chances. And funerals upset me so."

He took her hand. "Funerals upset me too," he said. "Especially this one."

She stayed in bed long after he had gone, thinking how glad she was not to be going with him: the chapel smelling of hothouse flowers and dusty hymnals and old men waiting in the pews. She had a long bath and a slow breakfast and spent the afternoon in the garden with a book on her lap, admiring the bright, shiny faces of her jonquils. She went to the Hookers' for dinner.

"Good God!" Josephine said. "Of course you should have gone." She

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rubbed her nose and glared. "Really, Amy, you're getting more selfish by the minute."

"I know, dear," Mrs. Marvell said mildly. "But Lewis does spoil me so." She smiled at Alden. No one, she thought, would ever want to spoil Josephine, that outcropping of New England granite in a plaid skirt.

But when she got home that night, standing at her back door, fumbling for the key, Mrs. Marvell suddenly remembered the last time she had come home alone in the dark. And when she stepped inside, she knew at once that someone had been there, stirring the air in that locked house. She saw one of the kitchen drawers slightly open and the liquor cabinet unlatched. She turned and ran back to the Hookers'.

"Well," Josephine Hooker said, pressing Mrs. Marvell's face against her cardigan. "Any bottles missing?"

Mrs. Marvell shook her head. "How can I tell? You know I never touch liquor. And I don't pay any attention to the supply."

"Pity," Josephine Hooker said. "Part of your unfinished education, not learning to drink. Now you'll have to go through life never knowing whether or not you're being robbed."

But Mrs. Marvell remembered the sight of that slightly gaping cabinet and the kitchen drawer hanging down like a greedy little mouth, and she shuddered. It was a long time before she got over the feeling that something or someone was waiting, just outside the house, with his shoulder against the door.

The housebreaking continued but only when Lewis was away, and so seldom and sporadically through the years that each intrusion came as a surprise. She had time, in between, to get angry. She refused to move the liquor. She refused to spend the night with the Hookers. She would not take down the arbor or put up an ugly electric fence or get a dog to chew her furniture and make messes on the rugs. She would go on doing as she pleased. Like the burglar.

She built a new little sitting room for herself with French windows, in spite of the burglar, and insisted that Lewis keep the liquor supply well stocked, perhaps *because* of him. But mostly she lived without reference to him. She pulled up her lawn in half a dozen places and moved the flowerbeds around like furniture. She hired a squadron of maids, one after the other, and fired them when they forgot to wash the empty decanters or put the sofa cushions back upside down. They all seemed to have fancy names and she dressed them in white.

"Like hospital nurses," Josephine Hooker said. "They even walk on their toes. So as not to disturb the jade ashtrays, I suppose."

"We're happy," Mrs. Marvell said. "I've made Lewis happy. With-

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out poetry. At least he doesn't have to do the cooking."

"Alden loves to cook," Josephine said. "And he never washes up." It was true. Mrs. Marvell had seen her with her arms in the dishpan and her face soft, the lines running together, and Alden practicing scales on the violin near the drainboard.

"Lewis has never had to do either," Mrs. Marvell said. "I've been a good wife. I've made him happy."

She wondered now, sitting at the kitchen table, smoothing the place mat, if this were true. But it was too late to ask him. Lewis was dying, inch by inch, in a nursing home twenty miles away, tucked discreetly between the pleats of the surrounding hills. It was where all the aged middle class of the town were sent when death loitered too long on the doorstep.

Lewis was suffering from a circulatory disease.

"Tired blood," Josephine Hooker told her husband.

"There's no such thing."

"Bored blood, then. After forty years with Amy anybody's blood would get sluggish."

But Lewis was letting go very slowly, beginning with his little toe at one end and his mind at the other and his heart holding the balance between them. It was as though, mild and moderate as he was, he could not accept anything so extreme as death and was temporizing still, keeping it at arm's length with his voice low. Every day when Mrs. Marvell went to see him, he looked at her sadly and asked why she hadn't come the day before.

Yet, when he had forgotten everything else, he remembered his manners and his sense of propriety. Whenever they brought him a tray or a drink or a pill, he would raise solicitous eyes to his wife and ask, "Where's yours? Why aren't they bringing yours?" And when the nurse said, "Did you sleep well?" or "Did you have a movement?," he would raise his voice slightly and answer, "Did you?"

But he had no defenses. A gentle man, he could not stay for the final battle but had moved out, looking in only occasionally, shocked to discover how far the invasion had advanced. He sat in the big chair in pajamas and robe with his hair long around his ears and barely enough strength to turn his head from the raised spoon.

The nurses stood about in the halls, big and white as plaster casts, and they often complained of Lewis to his face. "Keeps trying to pull the catheter out all the time," they told Mrs. Marvell. She would cry all the way home, remembering Lewis as he had been, tall and elegant in dark suits and so polite that just winding his watch seemed an act of courtesy.

In the garage she would sit in the car for a moment, drying her eyes and wondering if Lewis would ever come home again. And then she re-

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membered the burglar who came only when Lewis was away. She would go quietly up the back steps and stand inside the kitchen door, over against the wall, waiting for someone to brush past her in the narrow hall. And then she would look for the evidence. She found it more and more often, penetrating farther and farther into the house: a used glass in the sitting room, a broken stem on the begonia plant in the study, the tops of the decanters crooked in the dining room, and, just the other night, a dead leaf in the hall at the bottom of the stairs.

She had had the burglar alarm installed then, and all the locks changed once more. She kept all the inside doors sealed permanently, living only in the kitchen and the bedroom and the upstairs bathroom. But she locked even these behind her . . .

Now she put on her glasses to watch the birds, but the jay had chased them all away. Only he was left, fat and cocky with his head in her feeder. Soon he too flew behind a tree and disappeared. The garden was suddenly quiet. She took off her glasses.

Behind her the house was quiet too, with that terrible silence which had been seeping in ever since Lewis left. She was down to just the Wednesday reading group now and a Thursday maid (called simply Gussie), and they made no sounds that carried through the week. The phone almost never rang; or the doorbell. Everyone else seemed dead or busy or away.

Besides, she had never encouraged callers. She had never really developed any tolerance for people, any more than for alcohol, and she could not start now, could not listen to their prattle of husbands and grandchildren and the party at the Binghams'—not now while Lewis sat in a nursing home with his hands in his lap, waiting for the blood in his veins to stop flowing.

And so she lived in silence while the plants around her grew without a sound and measured the weeks with a length of green. Shy little flames burned unheard in the stove, scorching, at regular intervals, small holes in her day that were breakfast and lunch and dinner. Even the clocks were quiet, electric clocks that marked the time in silence, their hands sliding or sticking at will. She longed for the regular, dependable tick of her youth when she could hear the passing of time and it had a serene and soothing sound.

She was all alone in a silent house with a thief who came more and more often. Should she move to an apartment in town? Make certain, once more, that the tops were straight on the decanters and the sofa cushions right side up and call the auctioneer? There was no one to tell her—no one to advise or command or say, simply, "You're wrong." There was not even Lewis's mild "I don't believe I would."

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They said only, "Do whatever you want." Like shutting a drawer. Even Josephine Hooker had gone up to Boston when Alden died, to read poetry to her grandchildren.

Mrs. Marvell got up at last and washed and dried her cup and saucer. Then, locking the kitchen door behind her, she went slowly upstairs, holding her glasses flat against her breast.

Lewis was much worse that afternoon. He lay on his back in bed. His white hair almost covered his ears now and his beard was sprouting like new grass around his mouth. His words came out in a mere trickle that she could not understand. Until she got up to go.

"Goodbye, Lewis," she said softly.

He clung to her hand. "I really think you should come with me this time, Amy," he said distinctly. "I really do."

She drove home with the hand he had held on her lap tucked carefully under her coat.

At home she found her bathroom window open. Her housebreaker had come again, but it was the first time he had ever dared come upstairs. He must have climbed up the arbor. Now she would have to tear it down. Maybe put up an electric fence and get a dog. From now on she would even have to leave the car outside where he could see it *all the time.*

She called the police and sat down in the kitchen to wait. She could see the liquor cabinet in the pantry. It was open just a crack, making a thin gash in the smooth surface of the wall. She got up suddenly, pulled out a bottle, and poured herself a drink.

After the police had gone, she turned on all the lights and checked all the doors, including the inside ones—the dining room and the sitting room and the living room and the study. Whenever, however he came, there would be many sealed doors between them.

Then she picked up the bottle, locked the kitchen door behind her, and went softly up the stairs. She bolted the bedroom door, put the bottle on the dressing table, and sat down to wait.

She knew that sometime soon, very soon, tomorrow or the next day or the next, he would come again. And she knew that, next time, he would come when she was there. She would sit waiting for him in the locked bedroom, staring at the oak panel of the door, listening to the sound of his steps on the stair —strange, irregular steps like a man's with a limp.

She put on her glasses and poured herself a drink and stared at her bedroom door. It was a lovely door, all smooth with a rich, dark grain and an old-fashioned brass keyhole. It would be a shame to have it all smashed and splintered. Sipping her drink and staring at the door, she wondered, suddenly, if she shouldn't unlock it for him. Hadn't he been her most constant caller?

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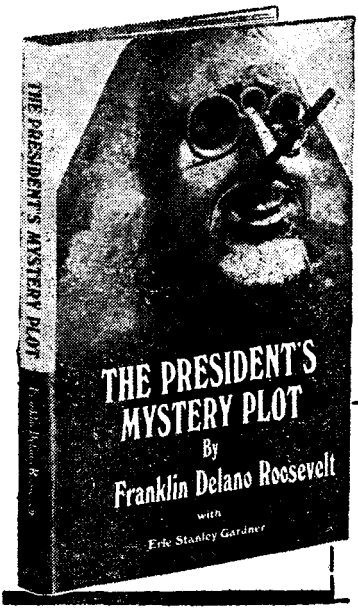

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

The solid core of mystery devotees, as I know very well from your letters, wants not only to read mystery stories but to read (and write) about them. They want to know about pseudonyms and alternate titles and variant editions; they want to re-assess the classics of the past and try to establish critical categories for the present. They want, in short, to apply to our field the tools of scholarship and criticism which any specialized art deserves. And now at last we have a magazine devoted to just this objective: *The Armchair Detective*, edited and published by Allen J. Hubin, 3656 Midland, White Bear Lake, Minnesota 55110. Vol. 1, no. 1 is small and mimeographed, but rich in both promise and achievement. Publication is to be quarterly; the subscription price is $2 for 4 issues.

★★★★ **THE NINE MILE WALK: *the Nicky Welt stories of Harry Kemelman*** (Putnam's, $3.95)

All 8 of Mr. K's too infrequent stories in EQMM 1947-67, gems of absolute armchair reasoning; a volume of QUEEN'S QUORUM quality.

★★★★ **UNNATURAL CAUSES, *by P. D. James*** (Scribner's, $3.95)

Miss James and her Superintendent Adam Dalgliesh keep getting better; their third case is a model of strongly clued detection-cum-character.

★★★★ **OPERATION HOODWINK, *by Maurice Procter*** (Harper & Row, $4.50)

Elaborate operations in illicit diamonds turn Chief Inspector Martineau's local case into an international puzzle; unusually large-scale police procedural, and unusually powerful and convincing.

★★★ **ROSEANNA, *by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, translated by Lois Roth*** (Pantheon, $4.50)

Solid straight procedural from Sweden, introducing the able and human First Detective Inspector Martin Beck, and proving that cops, criminals and people know no national boundaries.

★★★ **DEATH ENTERS THE LISTS, *by Osmington Mills*** (Roy, $3.50)

I hope I can soon stop referring to Miss Mills as "underrated"; this is a skilled and charming story of housing, politics, and murder and police work in Great Britain's Welfare State.

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Joan Kahn, the admirable editor of the Harper Novels of Suspense, has at last published a book of her own: THE EDGE OF THE CHAIR (Harper & Row, $6.95), a grand, big (250,000 words) anthology containing 21 stories, all fine but a few overfamiliar, and 13 even better non-fiction pieces—a highly personalized and stimulating collection, linked only by the broad concept of suspense. Not to be missed, even in this good year for anthologies. . . . The professional membership of Mystery Writers of America annually produces, of course, some of the best and some of the worst stories in the field; but I cannot believe that the purpose of the annual MWA anthology is to demonstrate that fact. MURDER IN MIND, edited by Lawrence Treat (Dutton, $4.50), does so, however, so thoroughly that I wonder whether the "best" portion (notably by David Ely, Joe Gores, Ellery Queen and the editor) makes it a necessary addition to your library.

★★★ **THE LOPINSON CASE, *by Paul J. Gillette*** (Holloway HH-140, 95¢)

Intelligent account, largely straight transcript, of a murder trial which rocked Philadelphia in 1965. Philadelphia is easily rocked, but the case provides an interesting puzzle and one great character.

★★★ **VIOLENT DEATH OF A BITTER ENGLISHMAN, *by Brian Cleeve*** (Random, $4.50)

"Violent" and "bitter" characterize all of Cleeve's harsh espionage novels about Sean Ryan; this is one of the best.

★★★ **THE DOLLY, DOLLY SPY, *by Adam Diment*** (Dutton, $3.95)

Not such a mod, mad divertissement as the blurbs promise, but a clever spy novel written with uncommon brightness.

★★★ **THE LADY IN THE CAR WITH GLASSES AND A GUN, *by Sebastien Japrisot, translated by Helen Weaver*** (Simon & Schuster, $4.50)

Shrewd and skilful specimen of the *nouvelle vague* (new wave) French puzzle novel—occasionally more vague than *vague,* but nicely calculated both in psychology and in pure technical plotting.

The newest issues in the Seagull Library (Norton, $4.50 each), with introductions by James Nelson, are Manning Coles's DRINK TO YESTERDAY (1941) and R. Austin Freeman's THE RED THUMBMARK (1907). Both are classic landmarks, but the Coles badly needs its sequel (A TOAST TO TOMORROW); the books are really a two-volume novel. The Freeman is a milestone in the fictional (and even factual) history of criminalistics, and still an absorbing, if gently dated, novel.

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Blasphemous?
Sacrilegious?
Irreverent?

In his accompanying letter, the author, Henry T. Parry, asked if "The Baker Street Irregulars Murder Case" is heresy. We confidently leave that judgment to you. Mr. Parry also wrote that Mr. Korell spoke extemporaneously, and no notes of his talk to the B.S.I. were ever found. "It is regrettable indeed," Mr. Parry commented, "that he was stricken before presenting the evidence which would have substantiated his possibly heretical conclusion about Sherlock Holmes." Yes, it is regrettable —but there is another possible reason why the corroborating evidence was not presented and has never been discovered: the evidence may be purely a figment, wholly imaginary . . . But then, on second thought, the wholly imaginary surely should not be despised—and surely not by, of all people in the world, the Baker Street Irregulars . . .

THE BAKER STREET IRREGULARS MURDER CASE

by HENRY T. PARRY

EACH YEAR WHEN THE BAKER Street Irregulars meet for dinner, one member, chosen by lot, rises and proposes:

"Gentlemen, to Lewis Korell."

The gentlemen rise, lift their glasses, then put them down in stony silence—the contents untasted.

"Gentlemen, our first case for this term of the grand jury concerns the murder of Mr. Lewis Korell whom you will recognize as the well-known writer of detective fiction and the creator of the television detective, Enfield Hance. Mr. Korell was murdered on the night of January 6 at a dinner given by an organization known as the Baker Street Irregulars. He was the guest of honor and principal speaker.

"The Baker Street Irregulars is a society devoted to the study of the works of Sherlock Holmes, referred to as the Sacred Writings. Each member is considered—or at least,

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considers himself—an expert on every facet of the career of The Great Detective, and on that of his companion, Dr. Watson, as well.

"The society has two rules: one, that all matters of business shall be referred to the monthly meetings; and two, there shall be no monthly meetings. The group is characterized by controlled high spirits and a highly literate sense of humor. Especially esteemed are the dead-pan essays offered by the members, using the apparatus of scholarship, to demonstrate highly implausible but generally favorable conclusions concerning Sherlock Holmes and the credulous Dr. Watson. The name of the society derives from the name given by Holmes to a corps of street urchins who acted as his intelligence service. Each year on a Friday close to the birthday of The Great Detective, a dinner is given in New York which is attended by members of the Irregular groups from other cities. At this dinner Mr. Lewis Korell was murdered by Mr. Makepeace Allen.

"Mr. Allen, 66, is retired after a successful career in the rare book business, specializing in books by an author named Doyle. He lives alone at 19 East 18th Street in one of the last brownstones in that area—the house in which he was born—and devotes himself to the repair of book bindings which less skilled practitioners will not attempt. At the proper time we shall show his skill as a craftsman in another field.

"As an aside, gentlemen, let me mention that in my eleven years as prosecutor I have never had a more unlikely subject for indictment on a murder charge. Picture, if you will, a frail, pink-skinned, white-haired gentleman, not over 130 pounds, with faded blue eyes and the suggestion of a quaver in his voice when he talks, which is seldom. His face has a withdrawn, other-worldly quality, the face of a man who had consciously shut out the distractions of everyday life in order to concentrate more intently on an absorbing private interest. This interest, we submit, is the cult of Sherlock Holmes and the society of the Baker Street Irregulars.

"For the past fifteen years he has devoted most of his time to this group in the capacity of unofficial secretary since the society's distaste for organization will not permit recognized officers. As might be expected, his knowledge of the Sacred Writings stands unmatched. Even by the Baker Street Irregulars themselves, Mr. Allen's devotion to the career of Holmes—fictional though it may be considered by some—is regarded as exceptional. This dedication, this almost personal identification with the life and times of The Great Detective, forms one of the bases on which the State will build its case.

"Let me now describe to you the scene of the crime. The dinner was held in a private dining room at McShane's Restaurant, according to

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annual custom. The dining table was arranged in the form of a U, with the open end near the room's French door, the only access to or exit from the room. The speaker stood at the center of the bottom of the U, directly opposite the door and about forty feet away; a microphone and reading light had been provided for the speaker.

"On the interior wall to the right of the door was the light switch controlling the room's overhead lights. Beneath the switch stood a table on which, in accordance with time-honored practice, certain artifacts associated with the Conanical Canon, as some of the Irregulars like to put it, were exhibited. Attached to each was an envelope containing a tongue-in-cheek affidavit that the item in question was the identical one mentioned in such-and-such a Holmes-and-Watson adventure or memoir. Mr. Allen's name appears on each affidavit as one of the signers.

"The items included a cap with a peak front and back, of the type known as deerstalker; a slipper with a turned-up toe, containing tobacco; a coal scuttle containing cigars; a curved meerschaum pipe; a violin; a 'genuine' gasogene; and a long-barreled rifle of the type used by Afghan tribesmen who operated against the British on the Northwest Frontier of India during the last century—a type referred to as a jezail, which is simply the Afghan word for rifle. Not a mock-up, not a tourist's souvenir. This was the weapon that killed Lewis Korell.

"Why was he killed? A tape recording was made of Mr. Korell's talk that night. I shall now play this for you and I believe the motive for this crime will become perfectly clear. Here is Mr. Korell speaking:

" 'Gentlemen, let me tell you how much I value the opportunity of talking to you tonight. I have been a member of this society for many years. I am not without considerable success in the field of detective fiction, as you know. My creation, Enfield Hance, is without doubt better known to more people than your Victorian hero, Sherlock Holmes. But not until this evening have the B.S.I. recognized this obvious truth by according me the opportunity to address you. Believe me, I shall make the most of this chance to do some plain speaking.

" 'First, I hereby resign from this childish organization. This statement should serve in lieu of a letter to your somnambulistic quasi-secretary, William Makepeace Thackeray Allen, or whatever his name is. Clatter away in your hansom cab with that!

" 'I find it difficult to believe that this society is the serious activity of grown men, or that adults would fly two thousand miles to attend its annual meeting. In the days of Frank Merriwell or Richard Harding Davis it might have been possible to accept the existence of such a body. If, perhaps, it had had its genesis on

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fraternity row in some provincial college at the turn of the century, or if the Malevolent and Alcoholic Order of Manatees had a secret ruling clique, a politburo of togetherness—under such juvenile circumstances I could possibly understand its continuing to function. But you are educated men. You appear to be sophisticated. Yet you are—there is only one word for it—puerile. Examples of the deplorable truth that Americans will join anything provided it is silly enough.

" 'Before I am drowned out by your cheering, I should like to proceed to my next point. The Baker Street Irregulars are dying. Oh, not in terms of membership or prestige. You are at the height of your success there. But you are dying in the spirit.

" 'How do I know this? I see the setting in of the deadly virus of organization. Badges, passwords, fake exhibits—all clouds no larger than a man's hand; but beware, or soon you will have bylaws and treasurer's reports and all the other impedimenta of organizations which have outlived their original purpose.

" 'However, I have a suggestion that will forestall this demise. Enlarge the scope of your society, bring it up-to-date. Make room in your pantheon for another god, with status equal to Holmes's. I refer to my own fictional detective, Enfield Hance. I do not deceive myself that you will act on such heresy and effrontery at present; but you could do worse, and the seed has been planted.

" 'And now, my friends, or my former friends, years ago when I entered this society I presented a paper demonstrating from internal evidence in *The Musgrave Ritual* that Sherlock Holmes was a descendant of Charles I and was therefore the rightful king of England. I should like to mark my resignation from this esoteric group by presenting another thesis, the outlines of which I shall now sketch in.

" 'I need hardly recount to this audience the incident at the Reichenbach Fall in which Holmes was presumed to have perished. That happened in 1891. Holmes does not reappear until 1894, as described in *The Adventure of the Empty House*. Where was he in the interim? He says he spent two years in Tibet although he does not say whether they were the first two of the three or the last two. After that, and not the short time intervals implied by Holmes's choice of words, he "passed through Persia, looked in at Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Khartoum . . . spent some months . . . in the south of France."

" 'Events enough to occupy an ordinary man's year perhaps, but Holmes was by no means ordinary during this period. Nor does he indicate whether he went directly to Tibet after escaping to Florence in the Reichenbach Fall affair. In short, there is a time gap in these years.

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"'Now, I maintain that the journey to Tibet was made in the latter part of 1892 because by then it had become imperative for him to be in a remote part of the world. Why? Well, to what was Holmes referring when he said to Watson: "Several times during the last three years I have taken up my pen to write to you, but always I feared lest your affectionate regard for me should tempt you to some indiscretion which would betray my secret." To which secret did Holmes refer?"

"'Let us return to the Reichenbach Fall. What strikes you as singular here? Is it not the word "Fall"? "Fall" not "Falls." Not a customary usage, gentlemen, but what does it suggest to you? Where else in the English-speaking world is the word "Fall" used geographically in this way?

"'Obviously that city which on August 4, 1892—mark the year—leaped into grisly prominence in the headlines of the world. Fall River, Massachusetts, where as the rope-jumping rhyme of the children had it, Lizzie Borden took an axe and gave her mother forty whacks. Someone else skipped the rope there, my friends, and it was no child. I submit it was the hero of this misguided society, none other than Sherlock Holmes. For consider.

"'A local doctor drove by the Borden house in Fall River on the morning of the murders and noticed a man acting strangely in front of the house. The doctor whose daughter was a friend of the Borden girls observed the man carefully and described him as pale, walking slowly with a rigid gait, his eyes fixed on the sidewalk, and apparently under severe mental strain. This man was never caught and indifferent police work was not the only reason, for what police force in the world could have apprehended a mad genius whose next admitted appearance was in the mountains of Tibet? . . . There go the lights. Could it be that retributive wrath is already descending on me because of the unheard-of blasphemy I have just uttered?

"'Yes, Holmes was mad during this period of his life. Listen to his own words, again in *The Adventure of the Empty House:* "There are some trees, Watson, which grow to a certain height, and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity. You will see it often in humans." We see it here in Holmes. In the trauma following the Reichenbach Fall crisis, his brilliant scientific mind developed an unsightly eccentricity, and in the grip of who-can-say-what forces he made the fateful word association and wandered about the world until . . .'

"Gentlemen of the grand jury, that marks the end of the tape recording of Mr. Korell's address to the Baker Street Irregulars. The explosion which you heard was the shot that killed Mr. Korell.

"I come now to an aspect of this case which, as a law enforcement officer and as a citizen, I find most

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alarming. That night, to prevent interruptions, the dining-room doors were closed and watched over from the inside. We maintain that the guard was Mr. Allen who had performed this function for each of the previous fifteen years. The waiters had been excused and two of them who were sitting outside testified that no one entered or left the room.

"Now there were ninety-two Baker Street Irregulars and guests inside. Yet there are no witnesses to the shooting of Lewis Korell—not a single one! The police and my staff have questioned every member and every guest exhaustively, some of them for very prolonged periods; but not one Baker Street Irregular or guest will offer any information toward the solution of this crime or in the prosecution of our suspect.

"Now this is not a group of conspirators. They are responsible men —men of education and stature. Among them are fourteen Ph.D.'s, one judge, the president of a society for moral uplift, and two clergymen. Why will none of them cooperate with the forces of law and order? Why does each of them, from the oldest—who can remember Christopher Morley, Fletcher Pratt, Basil Davenport, Edgar W. Smith, and the others who are gone—down to the newest member, uncertain of his grounding in the Sacred Writings—why do they *all* refuse to tell us anything except a routine, cut-and-dried, I-didn't-see-anything statement? Could it be that they feel justice has already been done? . . .

"If you did not know the background, privileges, and status of the Baker Street Irregulars, you would conclude that the code of *omerta*—silence—prevailed in this society and was being pitilessly enforced.

"In passing, consider the caliber of legal counsel retained by, or on behalf of, Makepeace Allen. While Mr. Allen is not a poor man, it takes a well-lined purse indeed to retain Mr. Wiley Abelson of Chicago, probably the country's foremost trial practitioner of criminal law, Mr. James Webb Swigert, Professor Emeritus of Criminal Jurisprudence, and Mr. Gorman Reilly, one-time District Attorney of this county and a former judge of the Appellate Court. Obviously a knowledgeable and well-heeled organization has interested itself in Mr. Allen's cause.

"Despite the complete lack of cooperation, we have nevertheless been able to assemble sufficient laboratory data and corroborative evidence to warrant asking for the indictment of Mr. Makepeace Allen for the crime of murder.

"First, we found in the basement of Mr. Allen's house the equipment, lathes, and so forth, for producing a rifled gun barrel. It will not be difficult to prove that the rifle that killed Lewis Korell was made by Mr. Allen and presented to the society some years ago as being an accurate, authentic, and highly effective model of the gun which fired the famous jezail bullet that wounded Dr. Wat-

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son during his service in India, as referred to in the Holmes saga. We also found the molds and scales needed in pouring slugs and in loading bullets.

"Even more damaging, traces of gunpowder were found in the pocket of the coat worn that night by Mr. Allen, proving our contention that he carried working models of jezail bullets to the dinner to be shown to the faithful as authentic reproductions of the bullet that hit Watson, and to be submitted as candidates for inclusion among the Holmes-Watson exhibits.

"Still more damaging, a ballistics expert has identified Mr. Allen's rifle as the one which fired the shot that killed Korell. Its heavy caliber is rarely encountered nowadays except in big-game guns. Nor are jezail bullets likely to be available at your local sporting goods store.

"Second, we maintain that Mr. Allen stood guard inside the door. To the left of the door stood the table exhibiting the Holmes-Watson memorabilia, including the Afghan rifle. Above that table was the wall light switch. The State contends that Mr. Allen switched off the lights, took a jezail bullet from his coat pocket, loaded the rifle, and fired in the dark. Loading and firing in the dark is not, as many of you know from your military experience, a difficult feat. And the target, you will remember, was spotlighted by the reading lamp.

"Thirdly, there is the nature of Mr. Allen himself, a sensitive, intensive individual who has devoted many years to the hero worship of Sherlock Holmes and to the affairs of the Baker Street Irregulars, who prizes his membership in that organization beyond most worldly considerations. To have membership in his beloved society ridiculed in a cruel and callous manner and subjected to cynical, self-seeking proposals, and, worst of all, to have a brutal murder imputed to his idol, all this was more than the withdrawn, absorbed Mr. Allen could bear. He fired the symbolic rifle and removed from the earth one who, he felt, was no longer fit to live.

"In support of the State's request for indictment, I shall now introduce specific testimony from police officers which will prove . . ."

Each year when the Baker Street Irregulars meet for dinner, after the icy toast to Lewis Korell has been proposed and rejected, one voice speaks out clearly:

"Gentlemen, to one who has proved that

" 'Stone walls do not a prison
make,
Nor iron bars a cage—' "

The response, measured and proud, comes from nearly a hundred voices:

" 'Minds innocent and quiet
take
That for an hermitage.' "

Then they drink to Makepeace Allen, H980582.

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CALENDAR OF CRIME

The January story in the CALENDAR OF CRIME *series . . . about a Club, and a select society within that Club, and a secret society within that select society, and a secret clue that unraveled the secret of the secret society . . .*

THE INNER CIRCLE

by ELLERY QUEEN

IF YOU ARE AN EASTERN ALUMNUS who has not been to New York since last year's All-University Dinner, you will be astounded to learn that the famous pickled-pine door directly opposite the elevators on the thirteenth floor of your Alumni Club in Murray Hill is now inscribed: LINEN ROOM.

Visit the Alumni Club on your next trip to Manhattan and see for yourself. On the door now consigned to napery, in the area where the stainless steel medallion of Janus glistened for so long, you will detect a ghostly circumference some nine inches in diameter—all that is left of The Januarians. Your first thought will of course be that they have removed to more splendid quarters. Undeceive yourself. You may search from cellar to sundeck and you will find no crumb's trace of either Janus or his disciples.

Hasten to the Steward for an explanation and he will give you one as plausible as it will be false.

And you will do no better elsewhere.

The fact is, only a very few share the secret of The Januarians' obliteration, and these have taken a vow of silence. And why? Because Eastern University is a young—a very young—temple of learning; and there are calamities only age can weather.

There is more to it than even that. The cataclysm of events struck at the handiwork of the Architects themselves, that legendary band who builded the tabernacle and created the holy canons. So Eastern's shame is kept steadfastly covered with silence; and if we uncover its bloody stones here, it is only because the very first word on the great seal of Eastern University is: *Veritas.*

To a Harvard man, "Harvard '13" means little more than "Harvard '06" or "Harvard '79," unless "Harvard '13" happens to be his own graduating class. But to an Eastern man, of whatever vintage,

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"Eastern '13" is *sui generis*. Their names bite deep into the strong marble of The Alumni Club lobby. A member of the Class is traditionally The Honorable Mr. Honorary President of The Eastern Alumni Association. To the last man they carry gold, lifetime, noncancelable passes to Eastern football games. At the All-University Dinner, Eastern '13 shares the Chancellor's parsley-decked table. The twined-elbow Rite of the Original Libation, drunk in foaming beer (the second most sacred canon), is dedicated to that Class and no other.

One may well ask why this exaltation of Eastern '13 as against, for example, Eastern '12, or Eastern '98? The answer is that there was no Eastern '12, and Eastern '98 never existed. For Eastern U. was not incorporated under the laws of the State of New York until A.D. 1909, from which it solemnly follows that Eastern '13 was the university's very first graduating class.

It was Charlie Mason who said they must be gods, and it was Charlie Mason who gave them Janus. Charlie was destined to forge a chain of movie houses; but in those days Charlie was a lean weaver of dreams, the Class Poet, an antiquarian with a passion for classical allusion. Eastern '13 met on the eve of graduation in the Private Party Room of McElvy's Brauhaus in Riverdale, and the air was boiling with pipe smoke, malt fumes, and motions when Charlie rose to make his historic speech.

"Mr. Chairman," he said to Bill Updike, who occupied the Temporary Chair. "Fellows," he said to the nine others. And he paused.

Then he said, *"We are the First Alumni."*

He paused again.

"The eyes of the future are on us." (Stan Jones was taking notes, as Recording Secretary of the Evening, and we have Charlie's address verbatim. You have seen it in The Alumni Club lobby, under glass. Brace yourself: it, too, has vanished.)

"What we do here tonight, therefore, will initiate a whole codex of Eastern tradition."

And now, the Record records, there was nothing to be heard in that smoky room but the whiz of the electric fan over the lithograph of Woodrow Wilson.

"I have no hesitation in saying—out loud!—that we men in this room, tonight—that we're—Significant. Not as individuals! But as the Class of '13." And then Charlie drew himself up and said quietly. *"They will remember us and we must give them something to remember"* (the third sacred canon).

"Such as?" said Morry Green, who was to die in a French ditch five years later.

"A sign," said Charlie. "A symbol, Morry—a symbol of our Firstness."

Eddie Temple, who was gradu-

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ating eleventh in the Class, exhibited his tongue and blew a coarse, fluttery blast.

"That may be the sign *you* want to be remembered by, Ed," began Charlie crossly.

"Shut up, Temple!" growled Vern Hamisher.

"Read that bird out of the party!" yelled Ziss Brown, who was suspected of holding radical views because his father had stumped for Teddy Roosevelt in '12.

"Sounds good," said Bill Updike, scowling. "Go on, Charlie."

"What sign?" demanded Rod Black.

"Anything specific in mind?" called Johnnie Cudwise.

Charlie said one word.

"Janus."

And he paused.

"Janus," they muttered, considering him.

"Yes, Janus," said Charlie. "The god of good beginnings—"

"Well, we're beginning," said Morry Green.

"Guranteed to result in good endings—"

"It certainly applies," nodded Bill Updike.

"Yeah," said Bob Smith. "Eastern's sure on its way to big things."

"Janus of the two faces," cried Charlie Mason mystically. "I wish to point out that he looks in opposite directions!"

"Say, that's right—"

"The past and the future—"

"Smart stuff—"

"Go on, Charlie!"

"Janus," cried Charlie, "Janus who was invoked by the Romans before any other god at the beginning of an important undertaking!"

"Wow!"

"This is really important!"

"The beginnings of the day, month, and year were sacred to him! *Janus was the god of doorways!"*

"JANUS!" they shouted, leaping to their feet; and they raised their tankards and drank deep.

And so from that night forward the annual meeting of the Class of '13 was held on Janus's Day, the first day of January; and the Call of '13 adopted, by unanimous vote, the praenomen of The Januarians.

Thus the double-visaged god became patron of Eastern's posterity, and that is why until recently Eastern official stationery was impressed with his two-bearded profiles. It is also why the phrase "to be two-faced," when uttered by Columbia or N.Y.U. men, usually means "to be a student at, or a graduate of, Eastern U."—a development unfortunately not contemplated by Charlie Mason on that historic eve; at least, not consciously.

But let us leave the profounder explorations to psychiatry. Here it is sufficient to record that something more than 30 years later the phrase suddenly took on a grim

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verisimilitude; and The Januarians thereupon laid it, so to speak, on the doorstep of one well acquainted with such changelings of chance . . .

It was during Christmas week that Bill Updike came—stealthily—to see Ellery. He did not come as young Billy who had presided at the beery board in the Private Party Room of McElvy's Brauhaus on that June night in 1913. He came, bald, portly, and opulently engraved upon a card: Mr. William Updike, President of The Brokers National Bank of New York, residence Dike Hollow, Scarsdale; and he looked exactly as worried as bankers are supposed to look and rarely do.

"Business, business," said Nikki Porter, shaking her Yuletide permanent. "It's Christmas week, Mr. Updike. I'm sure Mr. Queen wouldn't consider taking on—"

But at that moment Mr. Queen emerged from his sanctum to give his secretary the lie.

"Nikki holds to the old-fashioned idea about holidays, Mr. Updike," said Ellery, shaking Bill's hand. "Ah, The Januarians. Isn't your annual meeting a few days from now—on New Year's Day?"

"How did you know—?" began the bank president.

"I could reply, in the manner of the Old Master," said Ellery with a chuckle, "that I've made an intensive study of lapel buttons, but truth compels me to admit that one of my best friends is Eastern '28 and he's described that little emblem on your coat so often I couldn't help but recognize it at once."

The banker fingered the disk on his lapel nervously. It was of platinum, ringed with tiny garnets, and the gleaming circle enclosed the two faces of Janus.

"What's the matter—is someone robbing your bank?" Ellery asked.

"It's worse than that."

"Worse . . .?"

"Murder."

Nikki glared at Mr. Updike. Any hope of keeping Ellery's nose off the grindstone until January second was now merely a memory. But out of duty she began: "Ellery . . ."

"At least," said Bill Updike tensely, "I *think* it's murder."

Nikki gave up. Ellery's nose was noticeably honed.

"Who . . .?"

"It's sort of complicated," muttered the banker, and he began to fidget before Ellery's fire. "I suppose you know, Queen, that The Januarians began with only eleven men."

Ellery nodded. "The total graduating class of Eastern '13."

"It seems silly now, with Eastern's classes of three and four thousand, but in those days we thought it was all pretty important—"

"Manifest destiny."

"We were young. Anyway, World War I came along and we lost two of our boys right away—

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Morry Green and Buster Selby. So at our New Year's Day meeting in 1920 we were only nine. Then in the market collapse of '29 Vern Hamisher blew the top of his head off, and in 1930 John Cudwise, who was serving his first term in Congress, was killed in a plane crash on his way to Washington. So we've been just seven for many years now."

"And awfully close friends you must be," said Nikki, curiosity conquering pique.

"Well . . ." began Updike, and he stopped, to begin over again. "For a long time now we've all thought it was sort of juvenile, but we've kept coming back to these damned New Year's Day meetings out of habit or—or something. No, that's not true. It isn't just habit. It's because . . . it's *expected* of us." He flushed. "I don't know—they've—well—deified us." He looked bellicose, and Nikki swallowed a giggle hastily. "It's got on our nerves. I mean—well, damn it all, we're not exactly the 'close' friends you'd think!"

He stopped again, then resumed in a sort of desperation. "See here, Queen. I've got to confess something. There's been a clique of us within The Januarians for years. We've called ourselves . . . The Inner Circle."

"The what?" gasped Nikki.

The banker mopped his neck, avoiding their eyes. The Inner Circle, he explained, had begun with one of those dully devious phenomena of modern life known as a "business opportunity"—a business opportunity which Mr. Updike, a considerably younger Mr. Updike, had found himself unable to grasp for lack of some essential element, unnamed. Whatever it was that Mr. Updike had required, four other men could supply it; whereupon, in the flush of an earlier camaraderie, Updike had taken four of his six fellow-deities into his confidence, and the result of this was a partnership of five of the existing seven Januarians.

"There were certain business reasons why we didn't want our—er—names associated with the—ah—enterprise. So we organized a dummy corporation and agreed to keep our names out of it and the whole thing absolutely secret, even from the remaining two Januarians. It's a secret from them to this day."

"Club within a club," said Nikki. "I think that's cute."

"All five of you in this—hrm!—Inner Circle," inquired Ellery politely, "are alive?"

"We were last New Year's Day. But since the last meeting of The Januarians . . ." the banker glanced at Ellery's harmless windows furtively, "three of us have died. *Three of The Inner Circle.*"

"And you suspect that they were murdered?"

"Yes. Yes, I do!"

"For what motive?"

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The banker launched into a very involved and—to Nikki, who was thinking wistfully of New Year's Eve—tiresome explanation. It had something to do with some special fund or other, which seemed to have no connection with the commercial aspects of The Inner Circle's activities—a substantial fund by this time, since each year the five partners put a fixed percentage of their incomes from the dummy corporation into it. Nikki dreamed of balloons and noisemakers. "—now equals a reserve of around $200,000 worth of negotiable securities." Nikki stopped dreaming with a bump.

"What's the purpose of this fund, Mr. Updike?" Ellery was saying sharply. "What happens to it? When?"

"Well, er—that's just it, Queen," said the banker. "Oh, I know what you'll think—"

"Don't tell me," said Ellery in a terrible voice, "it's a form of tontine insurance plan, Updike—*last survivor takes all?*"

"Yes," whispered William Updike, looking for the moment like Billy Updike.

"I knew it!" Ellery jumped out of his fireside chair. "Haven't I told you repeatedly, Nikki, there's no fool like a banker? The financial mentality rarely rises above the age of eight, when life's biggest thrill is to pay five pins for admission to a magic-lantern show in Stinky's cellar. This hard-eyed man of money, whose business it is to deal in safe investments, becomes party to a melodramatic scheme whereby the only way you can recoup your ante is to slit the throats of your four partners. Inner Circles! Januarians!" Ellery threw himself back in his chair. "Where's this silly invitation to murder cached, Updike?"

"In a safe-deposit box at The Brokers National," muttered the banker.

"Your own bank. Very cosy for *you*," said Ellery.

"No, no, Mr. Queen, all five of us have keys to the box—"

"What happened to the keys of the three Inner Circleites who died this year?"

"By agreement, dead members' keys are destroyed in the presence of the survivors—"

"Then there are only two keys to that safe-deposit box now in existence—yours and the key in the possession of the only other living Inner Circleite?"

"Yes."

"And you're afraid said associate murdered the deceased trio of your absurd quintet and now has his beady eye on you, Updike?—so that as the last man alive of The Inner Circle he would fall heir to the entire $200,000 boodle?"

"What else can I think?" cried the banker.

"The obvious," retorted Ellery, "which is that your three pals trav-

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eled the natural route of all flesh. Is the $200,000 still in the box?"

"Yes. I looked just before coming here today."

"You want me to investigate?"

"Yes, yes—"

"Very well. What's the name of this surviving fellow-conspirator of yours in The Inner Circle?"

"No," said Bill Updike.

"I beg pardon?"

"Suppose I'm wrong? If they *were* ordinary deaths, I'd have dragged someone I've known a hell of a long time into a mess. No, you investigate first, Mr. Queen. Find evidence of murder, and then I'll go all the way."

"You won't tell me his name?"

"No."

The ghost of New Year's Eve stirred. But then Ellery grinned, and it settled back in the grave. Nikki sighed and reached for her notebook.

"All right, Mr. Updike. Who were the three Inner Circlovians who died this year?"

"Robert Carlton Smith, J. Stanford Jones, and Ziss Brown—Peter Zissing Brown."

"Their occupations?"

"Bob Smith was head of the Kradle Kap Baby Foods Korporation. Stan Jones was top man of Jones-Jones-Mallison-Jones, the ad agency. Ziss Brown was retired."

"From what?"

Updike said stiffly, "Brassières."

"I suppose they do pall. Leave me the addresses of the executors, please, and any other data you think might be helpful."

When the banker had gone, Ellery reached for the telephone.

"Oh, dear," said Nikki. "You're not calling . . . Club Antoine?"

"What?"

"You know? New Year's Eve?"

"Heavens, no. My pal Eastern '28. Cully? . . . The same to you. Cully, who are the four Januarians? Nikki, take this down . . . William Updike—yes? . . . Charles Mason? Oh, yes, the god who fashioned Olympus . . . Rodney Black, Junior . . . and Edward I. Temple. Thanks, Cully. And now forget I called."

Ellery hung up. "Black, Mason, and Temple, Nikki—the only Januarians alive outside of Updike. Consequently one of those three is Updike's last associate in The Inner Circle."

"And the question is which one."

"Bright girl. But first let's dig into the deaths of Smith, Jones, and Brown. Who knows? Maybe Updike's got something."

It took exactly 48 hours to determine that Updike had nothing at all. The deaths of Januarians-Inner Circlers Smith, Jones, and Brown were impeccable.

"Give it to him, Velie," said Inspector Queen at Headquarters the second morning after the banker's visit to the Queen apartment.

Sergeant Velie cleared his mass-

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ive throat. "The Kradle Kap Baby Foods character—"

"Robert Carlton Smith."

"Rheumatic heart for years. Died in an oxygen tent after the third heart attack in eighteen hours, with three fancy medics in attendance and a secretary who was there to take down his last words."

"Which were probably 'Free Enterprise,'" said the Inspector.

"Go on, Sergeant!"

"J. Stanford Jones, the huckster. Gassed in World War I, in recent years developed t.b. And that's what he died of. Want the sanitarium affidavits, Maestro? I had photostats telephotoed from Arizona."

"Thorough little man, aren't you?" growled Ellery. "And Peter Zissing Brown, retired from brassières?"

"Kidneys and gall bladder. Brown died on the operatin' table."

"Wait till you see what I'm wearing tonight," said Nikki. "Apricot taffeta—"

"Nikki, get Updike on the phone," said Ellery absently. "Brokers National."

"He's not there, Ellery," said Nikki, when she had put down the Inspector's phone. "Hasn't come into his bank this morning. It has the darlingest bouffant skirt—"

"Try his home."

"Dike Hollow, Scarsdale, wasn't it? With the new back, and a neckline that—Hello?" And after a while the three men heard Nikki say in a strange voice: *"What?"* and then: "Oh," faintly. She thrust the phone at Ellery. "You'd better take it."

"What's the matter? Hello? Ellery Queen. Updike there?"

A bass voice said, "Well—no, Mr. Queen. He's been in an accident."

"Accident! Who's this speaking?"

"Captain Rosewater of the Highway Police. Mr. Updike ran his car into a ravine near his home here some time last night. We just found him."

"I hope he's all right!"

"He's dead."

"Four!" Ellery was mumbling as Sergeant Velie drove the Inspector's car up into Westchester. "Four in one year!"

"Coincidence," said Nikki desperately, thinking of the festivities on the agenda for that evening.

"All I know is that forty-eight hours after Updike asks me to find out if his three cronies of The Inner Circle who died this year hadn't been murdered, he himself is found lying in a gulley with four thousand pounds of used car on top of him."

"Accidents," began Sergeant Velie, "will hap—"

"I want to see that 'accident'!"

A State trooper flagged them on the Parkway near a cutoff and sent them down the side road. This

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road, it appeared, was a short cut to Dike Hollow which Updike habitually used in driving home from the City; his house lay some two miles from the Parkway.

They found the evidence of his last drive about midway. The narrow blacktop road twisted sharply to the left at this point, but Bill Updike had failed to twist with it. He had driven straight ahead and through a matchstick guardrail into the ravine. As it plunged over, the car had struck the bole of a big old oak. The shock catapulted the banker through his windshield and he had landed at the bottom of the ravine just before his vehicle.

"We're still trying to figure out a way of lifting that junk off him," said Captain Rosewater when they joined him forty feet below the road.

The ravine narrowed in a V here and the car lay in its crotch upside down. Men were swarming around it with crowbars, chains, and acetylene torches. "We've uncovered enough to show us he's mashed flat."

"His face, too, Captain?" asked Ellery suddenly.

"No, his face wasn't touched. We're trying to get the rest of him presentable enough so we can let his widow identify him."

The trooper nodded toward a flat rock twenty yards down the ravine on which sat a small woman in a mink coat. She wore no hat and her smart gray hair was whipping in the Christmas wind. A woman in a cloth coat, wearing a nurse's cap, stood over her.

Ellery said, "Excuse me," and strode away. When Nikki caught up with him he was already talking to Mrs. Updike. She was curled up on the rock like a caterpillar.

"He had a directors' meeting at the bank last night. I phoned one of his associates about 2 A.M. He said the meeting had broken up at eleven and Bill had left to drive home." Her glance strayed up the ravine. "At four thirty this morning I phoned the police."

"Did you know your husband had come to see me, Mrs. Updike—two mornings ago?"

"Who are you?"

"Ellery Queen."

"No." She did not seem surprised, or frightened, or anything.

"Did you know Robert Carlton Smith, J. Stanford Jones, Peter Zissing Brown?"

"Bill's classmates? They passed away. This year," she added suddenly. "This year," she repeated. And then she laughed. "I thought the gods were immortal."

"Did you know that your husband, Smith, Jones, and Brown were an 'inner circle' in The Januarians?"

"Inner Circle." She frowned. "Oh, yes. Bill mentioned it occassionally. No, I didn't know they were in it."

Ellery leaned forward in the wind.

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"Was Edward I. Temple, in it, Mrs. Updike? Rodney Black, Junior? Charlie Mason?"

"I don't know. Why are you questioning me? Why—?" Her voice was rising now, and Ellery murmured something placative as Captain Rosewater hurried up and said, "Mrs. Updike. If you'd be good enough . . ."

She jumped off the rock. *"Now?"*

"Please."

The trooper captain took one arm, the nurse the other, and between them they half carried William Updike's widow up the ravine toward the overturned car.

Nikki found it necessary to spend some moments with her handkerchief.

When she looked up, Ellery had disappeared.

She found him with his father and Sergeant Velie on the road above the ravine. They were standing before a large maple looking at a road sign. Studded lettering on the yellow sign spelled out *Sharp Curve Ahead,* and there was an elbowlike illustration.

"No lights on this road," the Inspector was saying as Nikki hurried up, "so he must have had his brights on—"

"And they'd sure enough light up this reflector sign. I don't get it, Inspector," complained Sergeant Velie. "Unless his lights just weren't workin'."

"More likely fell asleep over the wheel, Velie."

"No," said Ellery.

"What, Ellery?"

"Updike's lights were all right, and he didn't doze off."

"I don't impress when I'm c-cold," Nikki said, shivering. "But just the same, how do you know, Ellery?"

Ellery pointed to two neat holes in the maple bark, very close to the edge of the sign.

"Woodpeckers?" said Nikki. But the air was gray and sharp as steel, and it was hard to forget Mrs. Updike's look.

"This bird, I'm afraid," drawled Ellery, "had no feathers. Velie, borrow something we can pry this sign off with."

When Velie returned with some tools, he was mopping his face. "She just identified him," he said. "Gettin' warmer, ain't it?"

"What d'ye expect to find, Ellery?" demanded the Inspector.

"Two full sets of rivet holes."

Sergeant Velie said: "Bong," as the road sign came away from the tree.

"I'll be damned," said Inspector Queen softly. "Somebody removed these rivets last night, and after Updike crashed into the ravine—"

"Riveted the warning sign back on," cried Nikki, "only he got careless and didn't use the same holes!"

"Murder," said Ellery. "Smith, Jones, and Brown died of natural causes. But three of the five

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co-owners of that fund dying in a single year—"

"Gave Number Five an idea!"

"If Updike died, too, the $200,000 in securities would . . . Ellery!" roared his father. "Where are you running to?"

"There's a poetic beauty about this case," Ellery was saying restlessly to Nikki as they waited in the underground vaults of The Brokers National Bank. "Janus was the god of entrances. Keys were among his trappings of office. In fact, he was sometimes known as Patulcius—'opener.' Opener! I knew at once we were too late."

"You knew, you knew," said Nikki peevishly. "And New Year's Eve only hours away! You can be wrong."

"Not this time. Why else was Updike murdered last night in such a way as to make it appear an accident? Our mysterious Januarian hotfooted it down here first thing this morning and cleaned out that safe-deposit box belonging to The Inner Circle. The securities are gone, Nikki."

Within an hour Ellery's prophecy was historical fact.

They opened the box with Bill Updike's key. It was empty.

And of Patulcius, no trace. It quite upset the Inspector. For it appeared that The Inner Circle had contrived a remarkable arrangement for access to their safe-deposit box. It was gained, not by the customary signature on an admission slip, but through the presentation of a talisman. This talisman was quite unlike the lapel button of The Januarians. It was a golden key, and on the key was incised the two-faced god, within concentric circles. The outer circle was of Januarian garnets, the inner of diamonds.

A control had been deposited in the files of the vault company. Anyone presenting a replica of it was to be admitted to The Inner Circle's repository by order of no less a personage, the vault manager informed them, than the late President Updike himself—who, Inspector Queen remarked with bitterness, had been more suited by temperament to preside over the Delancey Street Junior Spies.

"Anybody remember admitting a man this morning who flashed one of these doojiggers?"

An employee was found who duly remembered, but when he described the vault visitor as mufflered to the eyes, wearing dark glasses, walking with a great limp, and speaking in a laryngitical whisper, Ellery said wearily, "Tomorrow's the annual meeting of The Januarians, dad, and *Patulcius* won't dare not to show up. We'd better try to clean it up there."

These, then, were the curious events preceding the final meeting of The Januarians in the thirteenth-floor sanctuary of The East-

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ern Alumni Club, beyond the door bearing the stainless steel medallion of the god Janus.

We have no apocryphal writings to reveal what mysteries were performed in that room on other New Year's Days; but on January the first of this year The Januarians held a most unorthodox service, in that two lay figures—the Queens, *pater et filius*—moved in and administered some rather heretical sacraments; so there is a full record of the last rites.

It began with Sergeant Velie knocking thrice upon the steel faces of Janus at five minutes past two o'clock on the afternoon of the first of January, and a thoroughly startled voice from within the holy of holies calling, "Who's there?" The Sergeant muttered an *Ave* and put his shoulder to the door. Three amazed, elderly male faces appeared. The heretics entered and the service began.

It is a temptation to describe in loving detail, for the satisfaction of the curious, the interior of the tabernacle—its stern steel furniture seizing the New Year's Day sun and tossing it back in the form of imperious light, the four-legged altar, the sacred vessels in the shape of beakers, the esoteric brown waters, and so on—but there has been enough of profanation, and besides the service is more to our point.

It was chiefly catechistical, proceeding in this wise:

INSPECTOR: Gentlemen, my name is Inspector Queen. I'm from Police Headquarters, this is my son Ellery, and the big mugg on the door is Sergeant Velie of my staff.

BLACK: Police? Ed, do you know anything about—?

TEMPLE: Not me, Rodney. Maybe Charlie, ha-ha . . .?

MASON: What is it, Inspector? This is a private clubroom—

INSPECTOR: Which one are *you?*

MASON: Charles Mason—Mason's Theater Chain, Inc. But—

INSPECTOR: The long drink of water—what's *your* name?

TEMPLE: Me? Edward I. Temple. Attorney. What's the meaning—?

INSPECTOR: I guess, Tubby, that makes you Rodney Black, Junior, of Wall Street.

BLACK: Sir—!

ELLERY: Which one of you gentlemen belonged to The Inner Circle of The Januarians?

MASON: Inner what?

BLACK: Circle, I think he said, Charlie.

TEMPLE: Inner Circle? What's that?

SERGEANT: One of 'em's a John Barrymore, Maestro.

BLACK: See here, we're three-fourths of what's left of the Class of Eastern '13—

ELLERY: Ah, then you gentlemen don't know that Bill Updike is dead?

ALL: Dead! *Bill?*

INSPECTOR: Tell 'em the whole story, Ellery.

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And so, patiently, Ellery recounted the story of The Inner Circle, William Updike's murder, and the vanished $200,000 in negotiable securities. And as he told this story, the old gentleman from Center Street and his sergeant studied the three elderly faces; and the theater magnate, the lawyer, and the broker gave stare for stare; and when Ellery had finished they turned to one another and gave stare for stare once more.

And finally Charlie Mason said, "My hands are clean, Ed. How about yours?"

"What do you take me for, Charlie?" said Temple in a flat and chilling voice. And they both looked at Black, who squeaked, "Don't try to make *me* out the one, you traitors!"

Whereupon, as if there were nothing more to be said, the three divinities turned and gazed bleakly upon the iconoclasts.

And the catechism resumed:

ELLERY: Mr. Temple, where were you night before last between 11 P.M. and midnight?

TEMPLE: Let me see. Night before last . . . That was the night before New Year's Eve. I went to bed at ten o'clock.

ELLERY: You're a bachelor, I believe. Do you employ a domestic?

TEMPLE: My man.

ELLERY: Was he—?

TEMPLE: He sleeps out.

SERGEANT: No alibi!

INSPECTOR: How about you, Mr. Black?

BLACK: Well, the fact is, I'd gone to see a musical in town. Between eleven and twelve I was driving home—to White Plains.

SERGEANT: Ha! White Plains!

ELLERY: Alone, Mr. Black?

BLACK: Well, yes. The family's all away over the holidays.

INSPECTOR: No alibi. Mr. Mason?

MASON: Go to hell. (*There is a knock on the door.*)

SERGEANT: Now who would that be?

TEMPLE: The ghost of Bill?

BLACK: You're not funny, Ed!

ELLERY: Come in. (*The door opens. Enter Nikki Porter.*)

NIKKI: I'm sorry to interrupt, but she came looking for you, Ellery. She was terribly insistent. Said she'd just recalled something about The Inner Circle, and—

ELLERY: She?

NIKKI: Come in, Mrs. Updike.

"They're here," said Mrs. Updike. "I'm glad. I wanted to look at their faces."

"I've told Mrs. Updike the whole thing," said Nikki defiantly.

And Inspector Queen said in a soft tone, "Velie, shut the door."

But this case was not to be solved by a guilty look. Black, Mason, and Temple said quick ineffectual things, surrounding the widow and spending their nervousness in little gestures and rustlings until finally silence fell and

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she said helplessly, "Oh, I don't know, I don't know," and dropped into a chair to weep.

And Black stared out the window, and Mason looked green, and Temple compressed his lips.

Then Ellery went to the widow and put his hand on her shoulder. "You recall something about The Inner Circle, Mrs. Updike?"

She stopped weeping and folded her hands, resting them in her lap and looking straight ahead.

"Was it the names of the five?"

"No. Bill never told me their names. But I remember Bill's saying to me once: 'Mary, I'll give you a hint.'"

"Hint?"

"Bill said that he once realized there was something funny about the names of the five men in The Inner Circle."

"Funny?" said Ellery sharply. "About their *names?*"

"He said by coincidence all five names had one thing in common."

"In common?"

"And he laughed." Mrs. Updike paused. "He laughed, and he said: 'That is, Mary, if you remember that I'm a married man.' I remember saying, 'Bill, stop talking in riddles. What do you mean?' And he laughed again and said, 'Well, you see, Mary, *you're in it, too.*'"

"You're in it, too," said Nikki blankly.

"I have no idea what he meant, but that's what Bill said, word for word." And now she looked up at Ellery and asked, with a sort of ferocious zest, "Does any of this help, Mr. Queen?"

"Oh, yes," said Ellery gently. "All of it, Mrs. Updike." And he turned to the three silent Januarians and said, "Would any of you gentlemen like to try your wits against this riddle?"

But the gentlemen remained silent.

"The reply appears to be no," Ellery said. "Very well, let's work it out *en masse*. Robert Carlton Smith, J. Stanford Jones, Peter Zissing Brown, William Updike. Those four names, according to Bill Updike, have one thing in common. What?"

"Smith," said the Inspector.

"Jones," said the Sergeant.

"Brown," said Nikki.

"Updike!" said the Inspector. "Boy, you've got me."

"Include me in, Maestro."

"Ellery, please!"

"Each of the four names," said Ellery, "has in it, somewhere, the name of a well-known college or university."

And there was another mute communion.

"Robert—Carlton—Smith," said the Inspector doubtfully.

"Smith!" cried Nikki. *"Smith College,* in Massachusetts!"

The Inspector looked startled. "J. Stanford Jones—that California university, *Stanford!*"

"Hey," said Sergeant Velie.

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"Brown. *Brown University,* in Rhode Island!"

"Updike," said Nikki, then she stepped. "Updike? There's no college called Uplike, Ellery."

"William Updike was his full name, Nikki."

"You mean the 'William' part? There's a Williams, with an *s,* but no William."

"What did Updike tell Mrs. Updike? 'Mary, you're in it, too.' William Updike was in it, and Mary Updike was in it. . ."

"William and Mary College!" roared the Inspector.

"So the college denominator checks for all four of the known names. But since Updike told his wife the fifth name had the same thing in common, all we have to do now is test the names of these three gentlemen to see if one of them is the name of a college or university —and we'll have the scoundrel who murdered Bill Updike for The Inner Circle's fortune in securities."

"Black," babbled Rodney Black, Junior. "Rodney Black, Junior. Find me a college in that, sir!"

"Charles Mason," said Charles Mason unsteadily. "Charles? Mason? You see!"

"That," said Ellery, "sort of hangs it around your neck, Mr. Temple."

"Temple!"

"Temple University in Pennsylvania!"

Of course, it was all absurd. Grown men who played at godhead with emblems and talisman, like boys conspiring in a cave, and a murder case which was solved by a trick of nomenclature. Eastern University is too large for that sort of childishness. And it is old enough, we submit, to know the truth:

Item: Edward I. Temple, Class of Eastern '13, did not "fall" from the thirteenth floor of The Alumni Club on New Year's Day this year. He jumped.

Item: The Patulcius Chair of Classics, founded this year, was not endowed by a wealthy alumnus from Oil City who modestly chose anonymity. It came into existence through the contents of The Inner Circle's safe-deposit box, said contents having been recovered from another safe-deposit box rented by said Temple in another bank on the afternoon of December thirty-first under a false name.

Item: The Januarian room was not converted to the storage of linen because of the expanding housekeeping needs of The Alumni Club. It was ordered so that the very name of the Society of the Two-Faced God should be expunged from Eastern's halls; and as for the stainless steel medallion of Janus which had hung on the door, the Chancellor of Eastern University himself scaled it into the Hudson River from the George Washington Bridge, during a sleet storm, one hideous night in January.

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the *NEWEST* crime story by
CHRISTIANNA BRAND

A delicious story! . . . Meet Vi-vi's Great-Aunts—Honoria, the solid and forceful one; Felicity, the lugubrious and nosey one; and Adelaide, the frail and batty one—and what a tale they have to tell!

To quote: "After all, Elizabeth said demurely, the ghost never did anything she didn't like."

THE WICKED GHOST

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

YOU'D THINK NOTHING COULD BE more romantic and exciting than to be just an ordinary, everyday, just-out-of-college American girl and then to go and marry an Earl—a real, true, English belted Earl. And a young earl at that—Edward's relatives seemed to have combined in self-immolation so that he might attain the title, piling themselves into motor cars all together and getting themselves killed off at a tremendous rate.

Not that Edward had cared two hoots about the title; all he thought of was going off exploring in horrible foreign places. Intrepid, that's what Edward was: the newspapers were always saying so. *Intrepid young Explorer Earl, Edward Fitzmerrian, as he sets out upon yet another of his perilous voyages.* Nowadays they had changed it a bit. *Wives must weep,* they said; *lovely Victoria (Vi-vi) Fitzmerrian waves goodbye to her husband, intrepid young Explorer Earl, et cetera, et cetera.*

And even that, of course, was romantic and exciting in itself: plain Victoria Morgan from Wilmington, Delaware, suddenly promoted to Lovely Vi-vi Fitzmerrian, watching her husband's departure with tear-filled eyes.

And tear-filled was the word! For romantic and exciting it may all have been with a cathedral wedding, actually in the presence of royalty, and the Great-Aunts giving her pep talks on the Responsibilities of Privilege and the Honour of the Family and all the rest of it; but to find that Edward almost immediately afterward calmly embarked on another long adventure and just as calmly took it for granted she would remain quietly at Fitzmerrian with the Aunts in control—that was another matter! Any attempt at rebel-

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lion had been quelled with a quite astonishing firmness. Lovely Victoria (Vi-vi) Fitzmerrian began to be quite sorry for those poor old savages whom Intrepid Young Explorer Earl was always going to and bossing about.

The truth was, it was deadly dull. Fitzmerrian Manor, as everyone (in England) knows, is "at the other end of the world," an exploration in itself; too far from anywhere even to be turned into a Stately Home and visited by half-crown-paying barbarians, which would at least have brought some life to the place. As it was, the only sign of life for miles around lay in the bright dark eyes of Mario—Mario who, all the way from sunny Italy, had come to look after the Aunts' carriage horses —they weren't going to risk ***their*** lives in nasty dangerous motor cars —and who was the terror of the village belles for miles around.

Lovely Victoria (Vi-vi) Fitzmerrian, who up to now had never known at which end of a horse what happened, and hadn't cared— Vi-vi began to spend a great deal of time in the stables.

"Oh, dear," said Great-Aunt Honoria, "I do trust she is not going the same way as all the other gels." The other gels were various young cousins and great-nieces who had recently come paying duty visits to Fitzmerrian. "I'm afraid we shall have to tell her the story of Elizabeth and Wicked Cousin William. It cured all the others." (But really—that Mario! she added in a tone of despair.)

"It seems hard on the parties concerned," said Great-Aunt Felicity. "Not here to defend themselves."

"Cousin William fell downstairs," cried Great-Aunt Adelaide, beating softly on the breakfast table with her egg spoon. Aunt Adelaide was the slightly unstable one. Batty Addie, Vi-vi called her—to herself.

So that evening they took coffee in the Long Gallery, beneath the family portraits and more especially the portrait of that *other* William of long, long ago, who had been known, even in those conspicuously wicked days, as the "Wicked Earl." And a wicked gleam indeed he'd had in his eye, thought Vi-vi; ***he*** wouldn't go off exploring after savages—with something a lot better to explore here at home. Got up regardless, he was, in a coat, hugely flared, of plum-colored silk over a velvet waistcoat inappropriately embroidered with little innocent lilies in thread of gold. His wig was enormous, heavily powdered, and he carried in one hand a cane, amber-headed, with two golden tassels.

"One can't help thinking," said Vi-vi to the Aunts, "that he must have been quite a dish."

"A thoroughly bad man," said Great-Aunt Honoria. "And I am sorry to say that his namesake took after him."

"Your cousin William, you mean? The one who fell down the stairs and broke his neck?"

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Veils drew down over wrinkled faces, and bright old eyes grew shadowed. "Why, by golly, I'm *sorry!*" said Vi-vi, abashed by this unlooked-for show of emotion. "But if he was so wicked—? And only your cousin, and once removed at that? And surely it must have happened a long time ago?"

"Well, yes—it's a long time. Thirty-forty years?" said Aunt Honoria consulting Felicity. "Just one year after dear Hubert brought Elizabeth here as the new Countess."

"Such a pretty girl she was," said Aunt Adelaide, musing over it, rapping gently with the egg-spoon.

"Handsome is as handsome does," said Aunt Honoria.

"And just what did Elizabeth do?" (Left all alone here with the Aunts—younger then, but no chickens even so—as she, Vi-vi, was left now. The Fitzmerrian men, it appeared, were great ones for going off on business or adventure and leaving their ladies in chastity belts at home; for Fitzmerrian Manor, away here in the back of beyond, was a chastity belt in itself.)

More veils. And what went on behind the veils? Vi-vi wondered—what went on in their heads, the three funny old things? All this big talk about Honour and The Family and the rest of it—it couldn't have been difficult for them, poor dears, to safeguard their share of it; poor little crumpled-up Addie who looked as if a good huff and a puff (especially from a man) would blow her away; and Felicity lugubrious, her long thin nose oddly white against her pinched pink face; and Honoria—still solid as the house itself, and dear God! that was solid enough—rolling along, full of energy despite her eighty years, pushing around the gardeners and the dairymen and the ancient butler and the crones who still worked in the house.

(Not Mario, though—one cross word to Mario and—didn't Vi-vi know it herself?—a look came into those velvety brown eyes that presaged an outburst of sulks and sudden nostalgic yearnings for Italian skies. "They no send away Mario," he had boasted to her when she confided certain breakfast-table grumblings of the Aunts about his shortcomings. "Very hard to get good man for carriage; and Mario he like an angel with the horses—Signora Honoria, she say this word herself, like an angel.")

"So," said Vi-vi, "what did Elizabeth *do?*"

And Honoria and Felicity exchanged glances and suddenly it was time for Addie's beddy-bye. An old witch known as Nanny, so ancient as to appear to have been in fact Nanny to the Aunts themselves, was summoned and led the protesting old lady away. "It would upset her," said Honoria firmly.

"You understand, Victoria, it is never to be spoken of outside the family?" said Felicity.

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"Indeed no! Never to anyone at all, in fact," said Honoria. "And above all, not to dear Edward. But now that you are the wife of the head of the Family, my dear—"

"—and after all, this is between the women of the family," added Felicity.

"If you will give your solemn word—"

"Well, my goodness, of *course!*" promised Vi-vi, much intrigued.

So with many interruptions from Great-Aunt Felicity, Great-Aunt Honoria embarked on the story of Cousin William and Elizabeth—all those long years ago. A pretty girl, it was true, but—well, mettlesome. Like a young foal, like the Starlight filly that Mario was breaking in at this moment—("Such a tiresome young man, by the way; I learned today, Felicity, that there is more trouble about that Betty James in the village," said Aunt Honoria in an aside; and watched two young hands clench tight and the knuckles whiten.)

Well—and like any other young foal, longing to kick up her heels and scamper about in any meadow where the grass grew green. But of course young ladies, especially when they married into responsible positions, couldn't behave like young fillies. So the Aunts had Spoken to Elizabeth, and after that things had seemed to simmer down.

Until one morning Adelaide had come down to breakfast and announced complacently, "I saw one of the ghosts last night. I told you there were ghosts and I saw one of them last night."

"Of course there are ghosts," Honoria had said severely. Such a family would hardly be respectable, her tone suggested, without a decent ghost or two. "What did you see?"

"A shadow gliding across the upper hallway . . . Ah, there is Elizabeth," said Addie, catching sight of her standing in the doorway to the breakfast room. "You saw it too, Elizabeth, didn't you?—for I caught sight of your face at your bedroom door."

But Elizabeth, it seemed, could not take the fact of a ghost quite so calmly. "A ghost? Yes, I . . . Well, I did see something, Aunt Adelaide. I heard a noise and I got up and looked out."

"On the whole," said Cousin William, who just happened to be staying in the house—a compliment he seldom paid his three spinster cousins, let alone for so lengthy a visit—"on the whole isn't it usual for ghosts to make noise?" And he had leaned back and twiddled his thumbs and looked up at Elizabeth, still standing uncertainly in the doorway, with an oddly mischievous and teasing air.

"What else could it have been but a ghost?" Felicity had persisted.

"Of course it was a ghost," said Elizabeth hastily. "Aunt Adelaide saw it too, didn't you, Aunt Addie? A woman—I think it was a woman—"

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"No, no, dear, positively a man. I saw his — his nether limbs, you know."

"I expect the wig deceived you," suggested William, with another of those teasing looks at Elizabeth. "In those days the men wore powdered wigs."

"In which days?" said Honoria.

"Well, but wasn't it an Eighteenth Century ghost? We haven't any later ones, have we?"

"Yes, that's right," said Elizabeth eagerly. She came into the room and poured herself coffee. "An Eighteenth Century ghost. A big white wig and a long reddish-colored coat —that's why I thought it was a woman. I just saw the back of the wig and the long red silk coat."

"Not even a glimpse of the nether limbs?"

"William, if you *please!*" Aunt Honoria had exclaimed, looking horrified. She bent a somewhat anxious look on Elizabeth. "Are you telling us it was the Fifth Earl that you saw? *He* wore a plum-colored silk coat—his portrait is in the Long Gallery."

"Yes, yes, the Wicked Earl," cried Adelaide, delighted. "I saw him distinctly. A plum-colored coat."

"Gold embroidery down the front?" prompted Cousin William. "And the tasseled cane. And on his nether limbs—"

"That will do," said Honoria. "If he wore a gold-embroidered plum-colored coat and carried a cane—that is your namesake, William, certainly." And she looked at him piercingly. "Who was called the *Wicked Earl,"* she added.

"Golly!" interrupted Vi-vi, listening starry-eyed to an outline of these events. "A real ghost?" (And real was the word, she thought. That clever little Elizabeth, so quick on the uptake!) "And then?"

Well, and then, it seemed, there had been no more visitations from the ghost at least for a little while. Cousin William had betaken himself back to London; but, not at all to the Aunts' delight, he had returned—with armloads of boxes and parcels to be sure, full of presents for everyone; silky shawls for the Aunts—who put them back in their boxes and never looked at them again—and a pearl necklace for Elizabeth (not real pearls, he said)—and even, apparently, a new dressing gown for himself, to replace his old red one; a simply huge box the dressing gown had occupied.

And perhaps it was his uneasy presence in the house, perhaps it was the attraction of their identical names and not dissimilar reputations, of a certain family likeness—but soon the Wicked Earl, William, began to walk again. Aunt Felicity saw him this time—she couldn't sleep, she said, felt restless and somehow anxious; and for no reason that she could put a name to, at some early hour of the morning, she had opened her bedroom door and looked out across the wide landing.

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And there he was—and there was no mistaking him this time—the great powdered wig, the plum-colored coat over the embroidered waistcoat, one hand beneath its ruffled lace swinging a tasseled cane. And the face—it was the face of the Fifth Earl, not a doubt of it, right down to that—well, that *look* of his. He glided, unhurried, across the landing and slowly mounted the curving stairway that led to the corridors above.

Vi-vi knew those corridors. The Family Wing, it was called, with guest rooms reserved for visiting Fitzmerrians. Her own suite—which had in those days been Elizabeth's, it seemed—was across the broad landing from the foot of those stairs. (Golly!)

But aloud she said, "Weren't you scared, Aunt Felicity?"

"Certainly not," said Honoria, trumpeting in with it before Aunt Felicity's pink face could show any reaction. "It was only a harmless ghost. I kept an eye out myself after that and several nights later I saw it too—wig, silks, satins, cane and all."

Honoria glanced up at the Wicked Earl in his great gilt frame and he gave her back look for look. "He was a bad man, a braggart, a gambler, a trifler with women. No wonder he rests so uneasily in his grave."

And she added that though one could not possibly be frightened, still it was all exceedingly disagreeable. On the occasion that she herself saw him, he had been going the other way—moving across the landing with his back to her; and, on hearing this the next morning, poor Elizabeth had confided, very white and scared, that he had actually appeared in her room and stood there for a long time, with one hand on the upright of her great fourposter bed (Vi-vi slept there now, in that very bed) and gazed at her. So even in the spirit he had been up to his old tricks!

And Elizabeth had seemed so nervous that Cousin William had even suggested that she move out for a while; there were lots of vacant rooms in the Family Wing.

"And did she?" asked Vi-vi.

"Certainly not. It would have been most improper, with William sleeping in the same part of the house."

"Golly, yes, of *course!*" said Vi-vi.

Nevertheless, the Aunts had grown very anxious. If poor Elizabeth were going to be upset in this way—what would dear Hubert think when he came home and heard the story? (What indeed? wondered Vi-vi.) "So we took counsel, my dear, Felicity and Adelaide and I. Felicity was for calling in the parson and having the ghost exorcised; but really one would not care to submit The Family to that sort of intrusion; and wicked or not, he *had* been a member of The Family."

"Besides, the dear Vicar—he *was* a gossip," said Felicity.

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"So Felicity suggested that we do something of the sort ourselves—"

"—I had heard that Holy Water was used—"

"But then Adelaide suggested that the poor ghost would get wet, and I replied to her that one only sprinkled the water and Honoria became thoughtful—did you not, Honoria?—and said that such a man as the Fifth Earl would need something more than a sprinkling. And she went to the priest—"

"Yes, I did," said Great-Aunt Honoria firmly.

"—and in the night we each had a whole ewer of the water and stood in our bedroom doorways—"

For quite some days after that, it seemed, the house had been extraordinarily peaceful. The Holy Water apparently kept the ghost at bay; and even Cousin William was not around to talk to Elizabeth across the Aunts in that mocking, double-meaning, teasing way of his; for Cousin William, it seemed, was confined to his bed with a bad cold.

But soon the haunting began again and Elizabeth acknowledged that the apparition had come to her room once more and stood, hand on bedpost, gazing down at her. For how long she couldn't say—between waking and dreaming one really couldn't be sure. To the Aunts, sometimes catching a glimpse of him going one way, sometimes coming back—it seemed really a very long time.

Once or twice the Aunts went to Elizabeth's room in the hope of surprising him there; but Elizabeth began to keep her door locked and by the time she opened it to them, if any ghost had been there, it had vanished. The fact that the ghost apparently took no account of locks and bolts suggested that she might as well have left the door open and given the Aunts a better chance of confronting it; but no—she felt happier with the door locked, she said, and begged the Aunts most earnestly not to go to all this trouble. After all, Elizabeth said demurely, the ghost never did anything she didn't like. Cousin William choked into his cup of tea.

And then one night Nanny saw the ghost and Nanny told Cook and Cook peeked over the railing from the top story and also saw the crown of the powdered head; and soon the tongues of the neighborhood would begin to wag. And what interpretation would be put upon these events by a plebian outside world not used to the privilege of a family ghost, the Aunts did not care to think. One thing was certain: something very positive would have to be done to stop the visitations, and soon.

"We must talk to the naughty ghost and ask him not to come," said Adelaide, and the next night she called out to him as he passed her door. But he only turned his wicked white face toward her and stalked silently by and went on up the curving stairs. "If we could

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somehow barricade him up there?" suggested Felicity. "Put an obstruction of some kind across the stairs?"

Honoria had looked at her and once again grown thoughtful.

"If a locked door won't keep him out—" began Felicity.

But Honoria interrupted her. "The Holy Water kept him at bay for some days," she said. "Perhaps if we tied something across the stairs as Adelaide suggests—a scarf or a sash, something soft—and soaked it well with Holy Water, he would be unable to pass that. We could renew the Holy Water each day."

And she made a second excursion to the priest. "There, Addie, since it was you who thought of the idea, you shall be the one to tie it across the stairs, from banister to banister. The top of the stairs, dear." And she had sent Addie off with a soft black silk scarf well soaked in the Holy Water . .

Vi-vi's brightly enameled nails dug themselves into the palms of her hands as she listened to this recital. "Aunt Honoria—you *didn't?*"

"How was one to know that she would tie it so low down on the banisters, poor foolish creature, as to trip anyone up? And anyway, what did it matter to a *ghost* where she tied it?"

"You didn't really still believe it was a ghost?"

"Certainly," said Great-Aunt Honoria, looking back at Vi-vi with a steady eye.

"So you . . . So you sent Aunt Adelaide to tie the thing across, and that night Cousin William tripped over it and fell down those steep, curving stairs and broke his neck?"

"Such an unfortunate accident," said Felicity. "We felt very bad about it." And on the very night, she added, when he himself had made such elaborate preparations to lay the ghost.

"Preparations?"

"Why, yes, my dear. He had actually been to a costumier's, it seemed, and hired an Eighteenth Century costume, for that is what he was wearing—just like the clothes in the Wicked Earl's portrait. The plum-colored coat, you know, and the gold-embroidered waistcoat, the wig and the tasseled cane. To confront the ghost, you see, in its very own image. Or so dear Elizabeth explained to us, when she recovered sufficiently from the shock to do so. She was very much upset—so young of course in those days, and *so* impressionable. She felt it was on her account—to lay the ghost because it might be troubling her—that all these arrangements had been made and the accident had happened."

Vi-vi sat cold, frightened, filled with dread, looking into the two old faces—the heavy square old face of Great-Aunt Honoria, the pinched pink face of Great-Aunt Felicity with its prominent white nose. "You put the scarf there—tied it across at the top of the staircase—

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and your cousin was *killed?*" But hadn't there been a fuss, she asked. An inquiry, an inquest?

"An inquest, yes. There always has to be, it appears, in a case of sudden death—whoever the parties concerned may be. We spoke to the Chief Constable, of course—a gentleman still, my dear, in those days, whatever upstarts they may have nowadays, risen from the ranks. But he couldn't prevent an inquest, not even for us. However, he kindly arranged for a verdict of Accidental Death, with nothing to suggest what had caused the fall. We had removed the scarf of course, by his advice, and he saw to it that the fancy-dress costume was not mentioned. Indeed, we arranged a story between us that William had always been careless with the cord of his dressing gown, leaving it trailing, and that he must have been coming down to—er—the bathroom."

"You mean to say that the Chief Constable himself—he'd be the head of the police in the county, wouldn't he?—that he hushed the whole thing up?"

"There are advantages to being a Fitzmerrian, my child, as you will find. And then when we told him that it was poor Adelaide who had put the scarf there—well, he knew her, of course, and understood that she could never be held responsible."

Vi-vi sat for a long time, silent, staring at them, and found to her amazement that her hands were actually trembling. Many months more, she had, to live with these three old women, until her husband came home; and even then, she was bound by a promise never to confide in him. But she would: she was never coming to Fitzmerrian again.

"You will remember your undertaking," said Great-Aunt Honoria, reading her thoughts, "not to mention this to anyone? Not of course that anyone would believe it. It all happened before dear Edward was even born—like everyone else he has always accepted the Coroner's verdict. But should you break your promise—" She lifted her head. "Is that the stable clock striking, Felicity? It must be ten o'clock. I hope that wretched groom is back from his evening off and not making more trouble in the village."

A hint? A threat? Could it be that they *knew?* "You could never get away with it now," said Vi-vi. "As you say, even Chief Constables have changed, these days."

"Get away with—? My dear child, you must be hysterical. You are overtired this evening—been riding too much, perhaps. I must speak to Mario about it—this unfortunate story has upset you." Honoria sat there square and stolid, her heavy hands folded in her lap. "What would there be to 'get away with'? Cousin William had so thoroughly convinced us, hadn't he?—he and Elizabeth together—that we were dealing with a ghost."

But there, repeated Great-Aunt

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Honoria, the young were *so* impressionable. Poor Elizabeth, for example—she had never seemed quite the same after Cousin William's accident, had she, Felicity? Never again the frisky young filly kicking up her heels where the grass grew greenest. Quite the settled little wife and Countess, she had become.

"As you will also, my dear, I'm sure. You all start off a little skittishly—some of our own dear young people have done the same, and things are even harder for you to adjust to, so far away from your home. But you all settle down. The Family—you don't quite understand it when you're young, but it's a very real thing. The sense of Family, the Honour of one's Family—there is nothing, really, one should stop at to preserve it."

"Not even murder?" said Vi-vi.

"Nothing," said Great-Aunt Honoria.

And the stable clock struck the quarter and Vi-vi got up and left them, creeping away very, very thoughtful—lovely Vi-vi Fitzmerrian, who would henceforth guard her husband's honor and play with fire no more.

Aunt Felicity watched her go. She said, "She'll tell Edward, you know."

"He'll only laugh at it, and by that time the danger will be past. Not that I think badly of the child," said Great-Aunt Honoria, "but it was best to stop it before things went too far."

"Do you think she believes it?"

"She'll never be quite *sure*." Honoria laughed. "It does seem rather unfair, I must own, on those no longer here to defend themselves. Poor dear William! And poor dear Elizabeth!"

"And that poor dear Chief Constable!" said Felicity, laughing too.

"I don't think they'd mind. They had a great sense of Family, dear Willie, and Elizabeth too. I think they'd be more amused than—resentful?"

"I suppose it really was the dressing gown cord that caused that fall of his?" said Felicity. "How often we warned him, poor foolish fellow, 'Willie dear, you'll trip over that cord one day and break your neck.'"

Aunt Felicity rose to her feet. "I shall go to bed, Honoria. Your imagination is more fertile than mine; I do find these recitals very exhausting." In some ways, she added, wouldn't it really have been simpler to get rid of Mario once and for all?

"Oh, we couldn't do that," said Great-Aunt Honoria. "Grooms are so hard to find these days. And Mario really is an angel with the carriage horses."

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Monkeys, they say, have no tails in Zamboanga. But there are other interesting phenomena in Zamboanga—for example, the foolproof, escapeproof prison from which no convict ever succeeded in getting away. Well, no convict but one. And he couldn't possibly have escaped —except that he did . . .

An "impossible" crime situation for our favorite (fictional) team of detective-story writers—Martin Leroy and King Danforth, whose books, signed as by "Leroy King," are known all over the world, including Zamboanga. Once again the irrepressible mystery collaborators apply their ratiocinative powers to a "problem in deduction" . . .

THE PHILIPPINE KEY MYSTERY

by JAMES HOLDING

EVEN IN THE MOST FAR-FETCHED fictional mystery written by the collaborative team of Leroy King, a simple plate of fish soup had never led to the capture of a murderer. Yet in Zamboanga City, on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, that's exactly what happened . . .

The cruise ship *Valhalla* anchored in Zamboanga Harbor early in the morning. Immediately most of her passengers debarked by tender for a long, hot, tiring day of sightseeing in the city and its environs. Now, with the cocktail hour upon them, the Danforths and the Leroys decided to have dinner ashore at the Bayot Hotel, attracted to this hostelry by its famous specialty, *sinegang*—a superb fish soup which King Danforth, a fancier of chowders, was eager to sample.

They dined outdoors on a harborside terrace where the sea breeze intermittently afforded them some slight relief from the enervating heat that persisted even after sundown. And the *sinegang*, they unanimously agreed, was all that was claimed for it.

As they ate, a *vinta*, one of those outrigger canoes on which many Moros spend their entire lives, appeared out of the dusk of the harbor and nudged against the sea wall beside which their table was set. A man and woman, dark-skinned, both paddled the craft. A little girl of four or five years crouched amidships among the motley array of tourist goods which those sea gypsies had for sale.

With ingratiating grimaces and pleading singsong words in incomprehensible Tagalog, the child held up one item after another to the Americans, urging them to buy:

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shirts of *jusi* and *piña* cloth, made from banana and pineapple fronds; hand-carved statuettes of a lemon-colored wood; bouquets of brilliant tropical blooms; glistening shells gathered from the sea bottom.

Helen Leroy was captivated at once by this small saleslady. "Oh, Mart," she said to her husband, "buy one of her shells for me, please. Isn't she a darling, Carol?"

Carol Danforth nodded. "And the only woman I've seen in Zamboanga who appears comfortably dressed for the climate," she said. The Moro child wore only a sketchy loincloth of a nondescript color—like the lower part of a bikini.

"Just what we need," said Martin Leroy. "A helmet shell from Zamboanga that must weigh five pounds if it weighs an ounce. With the dead animal still in it, too, I'll bet. I think I can smell it from here."

"A bunch of flowers then," urged Helen. "How can you possibly resist that innocent child? Are you completely heartless?"

Leroy stepped to the sea wall. "Flowers it is, then. How much for those flowers?" he asked the child, pointing.

A beatific smile transfigured the thin brown face. "Four pesos," she replied in perfect English. "Or one American dollar."

Danforth laughed. "Some innocent little salesgirl," he said. "I'll bet she speaks Spanish, too."

"Si. Si," the girl piped. "You want flowers? Please?"

"For a buck I'll take a chance," Leroy agreed. He fumbled in his pocket for the money.

"A dollar and a quarter if I dive," the child said quickly. "You got a quarter, Mister?"

The others joined Leroy at the sea wall. "What does she mean?" asked Carol.

"Dive," said the child. "In the water. Here." She handed up the flowers, accepted a dollar bill from Leroy, then passed it to her father. "Now throw quarter in water, sir. Sea very deep here. I dive for quarter and bring it up. You watch, yes?"

"Okay," said Leroy. He tossed a quarter out into the black water about five yards beyond the *vinta*.

Almost before it left his hand, the little girl arched over the canoe's outrigger in a clean pure dive. She stayed under for a few moments, then her head bobbed to the surface. She shook water from her hair. Holding one small hand aloft, she swam rapidly back to the canoe. By the smoky light of the lanterns that were spaced along the sea wall to illuminate the dining terrace and the water's edge, they could see the silver winking of Leroy's quarter in her uplifted palm.

"Wonderful!" Carol Danforth clapped her hands.

The child, all smiles, climbed back into the canoe, with water streaming from her brief bathing costume. Suddenly Danforth

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smothered an exclamation. "Do you see what I see?" he said to Leroy.

Leroy nodded. "Her—pants?" His eyes were intent.

"Yes." They both stared at the small diver's loincloth, lighted quite well now by the lantern light shining into the *vinta*.

"What are you two muttering about?" Helen Leroy asked, and then she broke off and stared too.

Carol gave an uncertain laugh. "The color?" she said. "Is that what's bothering you?"

Danforth said, "Unless I'm color blind, that's it."

"Masked by some vegetable dyes, maybe," Leroy offered, "but the real color comes through when it's wet."

Helen spoke indignantly. "You can't tell me that little five-year-old is a convicted criminal!"

"Maybe it's her father," Leroy said.

"Nonsense!" Carol joined Helen in protest. "It's a trick of the light, that's all."

Danforth said slowly, "Just the same, I'm going to call Señor Bollo."

Señor Bollo was the Governor of San Ramon Penal Colony, situated a few miles outside Zamboanga. They had met him only a few hours before, while sipping tea in the grateful shade of an awning directly across the road from the forbidding stone entrance to the prison farm. Their Cruise Director had brought the prison governor to their table and introduced him.

"And these people," the Director had finished, "are the Danforths and the Leroys, Señor Bollo. You may have heard of the two gentlemen. They write crime fiction under the pen name of Leroy King."

Señor Bollo, short and coffee-colored, inclined politely from the waist. "I have indeed heard of Leroy King," he said. "As who has not? This is a great pleasure, sirs." His English was excellent. "Even here in Zamboanga your fame is known."

"Won't you sit down, Señor Bollo?" asked Helen Leroy, extending a slender hand in invitation. "You might as well, because our husbands will probably want to ask you a million questions about your prison." She nodded toward it. "We've just been given the grand tour, you know."

Bollo took the empty chair at their table. The Cruise Director excused himself and shot off on another errand. Carol Danforth poured Señor Bollo a cup of tea.

The prison governor waved a hand at the sapphire sea sparkling in the sunlight a hundred yards away, at the strip of white beach that edged it, at the gently swaying palm trees which sheltered the terrace on which they sat. "Have you ever seen a high security prison in a more beautiful setting?" he asked with pride in his voice.

"Never," said Helen, flashing

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him her devastating smile. "I'd almost be willing to *be* one of your prisoners, Señor, just for the view alone!"

With unmistakable warmth the prison official said, "And I would welcome you as one of my prisoners, Mrs. Leroy!" His glance paid silent homage to her blonde beauty.

King Danforth rubbed a palm over his crewcut and burrowed in his chair to get more comfortable. "Judging from our tour of your prison, Señor Bollo, you run a model institution."

Bollo bowed courteously. "Thank you."

"And judging from your handicraft shops and extensive gardens, you place a great deal of emphasis on rehabilitation, don't you?" Martin Leroy asked.

"We do," admitted the governor. "Second only to the emphasis we place on security, of course. One remembers, Mr. Leroy, that most of our prisoners here are murderers."

Momentarily his words caused a slight chill to temper the heat of the afternoon. Carol shivered. Helen said, "Goodness! Then I withdraw my offer to become a prisoner!"

Bollo bared large, square, very white teeth in a delighted grin. "I am desolate, Mrs. Leroy!"

Leroy put down his teacup with a careful impatience which showed how much he would have preferred cold beer to hot tea. "I'm curious about those prison pens inside the compound walls, Señor," he said. "The prisoners sleep there? And live there when not working?"

"Yes," said Bollo. "They are quite comfortable."

"But they're very insecure-looking for a high security prison," Danforth protested. "Walls of vertical bamboo bars four inches apart! That doesn't seem adequate somehow to confine desperate criminals. Why, even a persistent termite—"

Bollo held up a hand in amusement. "Wait. Those bamboo bars are very much stronger than they look, I assure you. They keep our convicts safely confined while allowing them to sleep and live in the open air. Our climate here, you understand, makes enclosed prison cells, such as yours in the States, intolerable. The heat would kill our prisoners. So we use those pens, walled with bars of bamboo—" he smiled—"and periodically we check for termites."

"Oh," said Danforth.

"Yes. The prisoners sleep on floor mats, communally. So only one door is required for each pen, you see? And that one door is fitted with a huge metal lock to which only the particular guard assigned to that pen has the key. He lets the twenty prisoners in his pen out in the morning and he locks them in again at night. During working hours, of course, the prisoners are shackled together. It is a very fine system. Very safe."

"No home-baked cakes with little saw blades in them," Helen

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asked, "passed through the bars by devoted wives?"

Bollo smiled and shook his head. "No. And furthermore, before he is locked into his pen at night, each prisoner is carefully searched for anything that could possibly serve as a weapon or an escape tool. So you see, escape is impossible."

Leroy said, "Impossible? Do you mean that no prisoner has ever escaped from your San Ramon prison, Señor?"

Bollo flushed and looked unhappy. "Never," he said after a brief pause, torn between pride and truth, "except once."

"Ah," said Danforth, "then one criminal did make it?"

"Yes. In shame I confess it. A month ago, for the first time on record. A murderer named Antonio Taal. A man who had callously decapitated a fellow pearl diver in a fit of temper. Your pardon, ladies."

Helen and Carol abruptly pushed back their teacups. Danforth and Leroy sat forward in their chairs, their faces mirroring intense professional interest.

Danforth said eagerly, "Tell us about it, Señor."

"There is very little to tell. This Antonio Taal worked in the woodcarver's shop which you no doubt visited today. He slept in pen Number Three. One night, after the search of his person which is nightly routine, he was locked into his pen with the other nineteen convicts in his group. The next morning when the guard for pen Number Three went to release the prisoners for breakfast, Taal was gone. Utterly. He had disappeared into thin air. Just like that." Bollo snapped his blunt fingers with a report that made Helen jump.

"Only Taal?" Leroy asked. "No other prisoner was missing from that pen?"

"None. And not a single bamboo bar was broken or damaged. And the pen door was still locked as securely as ever."

"A miracle," said Carol. "More tea, Señor Bollo?"

"Thank you."

Helen said, "I have two ideas about your murderer's escape, Señor Bollo. Associating with Leroy King all these years, you can understand that some of their deductive genius, in quotes, question mark, has rubbed off on Mrs. Danforth and me. Shall I explain Antonio Taal's escape for you?"

Bollo crinkled his eyes and showed his teeth. He was greatly taken with Helen. "Please do so," he begged.

"Well, first of all, I think that Antonio Taal was on a hunger strike over some fancied grievance. Was he?"

"No," said Bollo. "I am sorry. He always ate like a pig."

"Oh. I was going to say that a rigid diet could have made the prisoner so thin that he could have squeezed out of his pen between the bars. If, of course, he happened to

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have a rather small skull to begin with."

Bollo was convulsed with merriment. "Only four inches between bars," he said through his laughter. "What is your second idea, please?"

"My second idea," said Helen, "would be to interrogate the guard for pen Number Three pretty darn carefully."

Danforth and Leroy grinned at each other. "She has something there," Leroy said.

"We did, Mrs. Leroy," Bollo said, sobering. "At great length. And without result. He was able to prove conclusively that neither he nor his key to pen Number Three had been out of the guard's dormitory all night. Under severe interrogation every one of Taal's penmates denied seeing or hearing anything during the night that could have any bearing on Taal's escape."

"Then," said Leroy quickly, "it becomes simply a matter of a duplicate key, doesn't it?"

"No." Bollo was positive. "For the simple reason that a duplicate key could not conceivably have escaped detection whether it had been hidden on Taal's person or in his prison pen. The keys to our pens are no delicate, flat little space-savers, you understand. They are massive. Their stems are three inches long and curved like a half moon; their loops are an inch across; the pins and webs below the collar are made of iron a quarter of an inch thick. Not an easy key to conceal, you must see that. And I assure you that our daily searches of the convicts' quarters and persons—" he cast a sidelong look of faint embarrassment at the ladies—"are thorough in the extreme."

Señor Bollo paused reflectively before continuing. "Even if Taal somehow obtained a duplicate key and somehow succeeded in hiding it until the night of his escape, how, I have asked myself a thousand times, did he manage to get over the prison wall that surrounds the compound? You can see it from here. It is eleven feet high and has that projecting inner catwalk for guard patrol built along its top all the way around the compound. With a ladder or a rope that wall conceivably might be scaled from the inside. But not by a man who had neither. And not by a man who had a seriously injured foot."

"An injured foot?" Leroy pounced.

"Yes. A knife cut between the big toe and second toe of his right foot. Sometime before his escape he had accidentally dropped his woodcarving knife in the shop while working. The knife fell point down, penetrating his bare foot deeply. To complicate matters, the cut became infected, crippling Taal to the point where he needed a walking stick to get around at all—even the short distances between his pen, the workshop, and the dining barracks."

"Do guards patrol the wall all night?" Danforth asked.

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"One guard. With a submachine gun. He patrols the catwalk continuously. At any sign of trouble he signals the guards on the main gate to turn on the floodlights, illuminating the whole compound as brightly as day. No such warning occurred the night of Taal's disappearance."

For a few moments no one spoke. A vagrant breath of air from the sea made the fronds of the palm trees rattle. With a conspiratorial twisting of the lips Leroy looked at Danforth and grinned.

Danforth said, "Señor Bollo, your escaped prisoner—this is the kind of problem that my partner and I concern ourselves with constantly in plotting our mystery stories. We find the discussion and analysis of such puzzles stimulating. They help us to make our living. Will you therefore forgive what may seem like an impertinence to you, and let the two of us speculate on your puzzle? I think we can explain how Antonio Taal escaped."

It was Bollo's turn to sit forward in his chair. "You are joking, surely. You seriously think you can solve a mystery in ten minutes that my staff and I have been working on for four weeks without success?" His square teeth showed a grin that now had a hint of derision.

"Yes," Leroy murmured, his sunburned face assuming the bland expression that his wife called his "Q.E.D." Look. "Yes, I think we can."

"Please don't take offense, Señor Bollo," Helen said hastily, putting a hand on his sleeve. "You are dealing here, don't forget, with a two-headed professional mystery computer into which, or into whom, you merely feed the known facts of your puzzle and out of which, or out of whom, the solution is inevitably belched forth!"

Leroy patted her knee under the table. "Isn't that a rather indelicate description of your husband and his partner?"

Carol said, "Yes, Señor Bollo, we apologize for them." She looked around for a waiter. "Don't they serve anything but tea in this place, for heaven's sake?" Her voice was plaintive.

Danforth lit a cigarette and blew smoke into the overheated air. "I can see you're skeptical, Señor Bollo. And I don't blame you. Will you let us try, however? And answer just one more question first?"

"It will be my pleasure." Bollo had the air of a man trying to go along with a gag thought up by idiot children.

"This walking stick used by Taal to hobble about on," said Danforth. "Was he allowed to take it into his pen with him at night?"

"He was. He could not walk without it. And it is sometimes necessary, you understand, for a prisoner to get up at night . . ." Bollo let his words trail off, again glancing self-consciously at the ladies.

"A fact of nature," Leroy said

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sententiously, "and not to be denied, even in a prison pen. Exactly what kind of walking stick did Taal use?"

Bollo pointed at the souvenir walking stick that Helen Leroy had purchased an hour before from a shackled woodcarver in the prison shop. "One of those," Bollo said. "The kind Taal himself carved for sale to tourists."

Danforth, in high spirits, struck the table a light blow. "I thought so," he said. "You begin, Mart."

Leroy nodded. "Señor Bollo. Taal was a woodcarver in your prison shop. So he must have been skilled with a knife."

"Skilled enough to cut off a pal's head over a pearl," Carol offered.

"Quiet," Leroy admonished her. "I was saying. Antonio Taal undoubtedly made the duplicate key to pen Number Three himself. Carved it out of wood, at odd moments when he was unobserved in the shop."

Bollo started to protest. Danforth interrupted him. "Wait, now, give us a chance. Taal saw the guard's key to pen Number Three hundreds of times, eh? A keen observer could have registered its size, shape, and general configuration quite accurately after a few years of looking at it every day, couldn't he? And kept the details in his memory? Besides, Taal also had the lock itself, into which the key fitted, before his eyes every day. So he decided to try his hand at *carving* a key that would lead him to freedom. Isn't that a reasonable assumption."

"Impossible."

"Not at all." Leroy took up the argument. "You are going to say, where could Taal keep his wooden key while he was laboriously carving it over a period of many weeks so that no guard or other prisoner would suspect its existence?"

"Where?" said Bollo. "Exactly."

"In the handle of one of the walking sticks he was carving in the shop," Danforth supplied the answer promptly. He reached out and took Helen's walking stick which was hanging by its handle over the back of her chair.

It was a handsome cane. A thick curved hand-grip, shaped like the grip of a revolver, topped a stout stick of beautifully carved mahogany. The stick tapered in a graceful series of octagonal, round, and spiral sections to a slender ferrule. Its entire length was embellished with bands, studs, and floral designs of mother-of-pearl, delicately inlaid in the wood. The butt end of the stick's grip was faced with a large oval lozenge of mother-of-pearl, two inches in length and one inch in width.

"He hollowed out the handle of one of these sticks," Danforth went on. "Made a cavity big enough to hold the duplicate key. Then he covered the cavity with a big wafer of mother-of-pearl like this one, easily removable, easily replaced. And

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he merely refrained from finishing the carving and decoration of that particular stick so it would not be sold to a tourist before he was ready to use the key inside its handle."

"But," said Señor Bollo, still humoring these odd Americans, "he could not have known that his wooden key would actually turn the pen lock. Not possibly. The chances of carving from memory a key that would fit the lock are a million to one!"

"True," Leroy admitted. "So Taal made sure that the key he was carving *would* fit."

"How?"

"By deliberately cutting his foot with his carving knife," Leroy said. "How else?"

"Oh, come now," Bollo said indulgently. "It was an accident. There was nothing deliberate about it. The other woodcarvers in the shop testified to that."

"Naturally," Danforth said. "Taal meant it to look like an accident. But we would be naive to believe it, wouldn't we? A man so skilled in handling a knife as Taal? No. He cut his foot on purpose. And infected it deliberately, too, I'll bet, so that your prison doctor would recommend that he be allowed to use a cane. In any event, he *was* permitted to use the cane, wasn't he?"

"He was."

"So what have we?" Danforth spoke with relish. "A convicted murderer, a crippled murderer, with a wooden key to his pen door concealed in his cane's handle. And a natural need, like all of us, to get up at night occasionally. Surreptitiously on these occasions he tries his key, removed from the cane handle, in the lock of the pen door. And guided by these clandestine nocturnal tests, he adds refinements, the finishing touches, to the web of his carved key next day in the shop. Finally one night the key *works* when he tries it in the pen lock. He thereupon seizes the first opportunity, when all his penmates are sound asleep, to unlock the door of the pen, hobble out cane in hand, relock the door from the outside, and make himself scarce. It could be, couldn't it, Señor Bollo?"

Bollo shook his head. "What of the compound wall?" He pointed dramatically across the road. "What of the patrolling guard on top of the wall? And how could a crippled man, whose foot was agony to touch to the ground, possibly run far enough to escape?—even if he *did* miraculously manage to get over the wall."

"That's not too difficult to explain," Leroy said placidly. He and Danforth were enjoying themselves. "One guard patrolling the catwalk on top of the wall means there would be intervals of several minutes between his successive visits to any specific point on the perimeter. Especially if he walks clear around the compound on each pass, as you say he does. Antonio Taal, it seems

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to me, would merely time the guard's patrol and go over the wall while the guard was on the other side of the compound. Simple."

"How?" asked Bollo, beginning to perspire. "How did he scale the wall?"

"How tall was Taal?" Danforth asked.

"Perhaps five and a half feet."

"Figure it out then," Danforth said. "If he's five and a half feet tall, he probably has a reach of about seven feet, give or take a couple of inches, when he stands on tiptoe and reaches upward. Add to this the three-foot length of the walking stick in his hand. And the few desperate inches he could force himself to jump off his uninjured foot. Holding his cane by its ferrule end, and using the handle of the stick as a hook to catch over the inner rail of the catwalk on the wall's top, an agile man could climb up his cane, hand over hand, and reach the top of an eleven foot wall quite easily. And descend the same way on the other side." Danforth winked at Leroy. "*Was* Taal an agile man, Señor Bollo?"

Bollo coughed. "Yes," he said slowly. "He was as muscular as a monkey."

"Which, incidentally, have no tails in Zamboanga, I understand," Carol murmured.

Bollo exclaimed, almost to himself, "By our Lady of Pillar! Yes. Yes. It is barely possible." He half stood, then sat again, looking crestfallen. "But no," he said, his coffee-colored face solemn, "not with a foot like Taal's. He could not have traveled a quarter of a mile from here by morning—even if he had crawled on his belly. Yet the greatest manhunt Zamboanga ever saw combed every rock, beach, blade of grass, and patch of jungle within a ten-mile radius of this prison within six hours after Taal was discovered missing, and no trace of him was found. Nor was any cart, car, boat, or outrigger in which he might have escaped reported missing."

He broke off abruptly as a file of men in shapeless garments of an odd, orange-russet color trudged slowly down the road toward the prison gate, trying to walk in step through their own dust. The chains connecting them leg to leg made a metallic clinking, plainly audible to the tea drinkers under the awning opposite the gate. A guard carrying a shotgun walked beside the file of prisoners.

"A road gang coming in for dinner," Bollo said, gesturing. Then, "And that is another thing. Those prison clothes—"

Helen interrupted him. "They're a darling color, Señor Bollo. Such a chic orangy-red! I wish I could buy some of that cloth to take home with me. It would make awfully cute slacks, Carol."

Bollo showed his big white teeth. "I'm afraid that is out of the question, Mrs. Leroy. The cloth is not

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available to the public. Only my prisoners wear it. Its color is unique, as you say. That special orange dye is used only for prison material. Very high visibility color, do you see? Anyone wearing clothes of that color is instantly recognized as a convicted criminal. That is what I meant, gentleman—another puzzling factor about Taal's escape. Dressed in prison clothes of that color, he would have stood out like a shark among pilot fish. Yet no one in Zamboanga saw him."

He shrugged and smiled at Helen. "I think you are right, after all, Mrs. Leroy. More right than your husband. Antonio Taal starved himself to nothing and was spirited out of my prison camp to heaven, a disembodied ghost."

Leroy laughed. "There's a simpler explanation than that. I think you may have inadvertently overlooked one important fact in connection with your murderer."

"What fact is that?"

"He was a pearl diver," Leroy said. "Therefore an excellent swimmer. A man used to the water, at home in the sea. I think he *swam* away from your prison by night, when his orange clothing could not be seen, and laid up for rest at daylight in some lonely cove along the shore between here and Zamboanga City." Leroy thumbed at the murmuring surf a few yards away. "We saw plenty of likely spots as we drove out here today along the coast road. And a very good swimmer could easily swim ten miles before daybreak in a calm sea if he escaped from the pen in the middle of the night."

Explosively Señor Bollo called once again on Pillar, patron saint of Zamboanga. The expression on his face was a comic mixture of sudden enlightenment and chagrin, mixed with anger, astonishment, and at last, healthy amusement. When Danforth added innocently, "And as for Taal's infected foot, its long immersion in salt water might have proved most beneficial," the amusement won out over his other emotions, and Bollo laughed heartily.

"A remarkable reconstruction," he said, "thoroughly worthy of Leroy King. *If* it happened that way, of course."

Danforth grinned. "It *may* be a little far-fetched," he conceded, "but it is not at all incredible."

"In any event," Bollo said, "Taal escaped and is still at large. He is a brutal, short-tempered murderer who will almost certainly kill again. If I could get him back in San Ramon prison before he does so, I would be a very happy man."

"So here's to a very happy man," said Danforth, taking a sip of his nightcap. It was shortly after midnight. They sat in the Horseshoe Bar of the *Valhalla,* now breathing the long swells of the Celebes Sea, Borneo-bound. "To Señor Bollo, who has his wandering murderer

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safely behind bamboo bars once more."

"Thanks to our sharp eyes and sharper minds," said Leroy self-satisfiedly.

Helen bristled. "Thanks to a four-year-old child, you mean!"

"What?" Danforth was bland. "Just because the kid happened to be diving and found Taal's orange convict suit on the sea bottom, weighted down with rocks under some widow's house in the Mohammedan settlement? And told Bollo where it was so he could raid the place earlier tonight?"

"Isn't that enough?" Helen said. "They caught the escaped murderer there, didn't they? Terrorizing the widow into feeding and hiding him!"

"True. But what about the child's mother, if it comes to a question of who's responsible for catching Taal? *She's* the one who made bathing trunks for her youngster out of the orange material the kid found." Danforth winked at his partner. "And if we hadn't noticed the color of the child's bikini—"

"Which brings us back to those sharp eyes I mentioned," said Leroy. "Ours."

"Then your sharp eyes are also responsible, I take it," said Carol with some spirit, "for the poor constable's arm that Antonio Taal broke with *that* while resisting arrest." She pointed to a walking stick Leroy held between his knees —a parting gift from Señor Bollo. Behind a large disk of mother-of-pearl in the hollow handle of the cane the prison governor had found the duplicate key—a massive key crudely carved out of hardwood.

"It seems to me," murmured Leroy soothingly, "that perhaps the best case of all could be made for the fish soup."

"I know it is undignified to bicker with one's wives," remarked Danforth with the air of a man much put upon, "but simple justice requires me to point out, all the same, that Leroy King's reconstruction of the escape was flawless."

Helen laughed. "Yes, but it was a very simple puzzle," she said. "Why, even stupid little me had several perfectly good explanations."

"Yeah," her husband jeered affectionately. "Between you and Bollo you had Taal starving himself to death and rising up to heaven as a disembodied spirit! Is that what you call a perfectly good explanation?"

Danforth chuckled. "You know something? *I* would have favored that theory too, except for one thing."

"What?"

"I just couldn't seem to picture a disembodied spirit wearing orange pants!"

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a *NEW* detective spoof by

JAMES POWELL

Detective writers have thought of and developed every imaginable theme as the basis of spoof and satire. Every imaginable theme? Well, perhaps not every one. For who would have dreamed, in this day and age, of a mystery writer using The Theft of the Idol's Eye? (Shades of THE MOONSTONE *and of Lord Dunsany!). And not only use so ancient a gambit (though a surprisingly fresh one today because of its long disuse) but tie it in with contemporary manners and mores.*

Well, James Powell has done it—and more power to him for his audacity. But then, James Powell (remember his "The Friends of Hector Jouvet" and "The Stollmeyer Sonnets" and "The Beddoes Scheme"?) is an "original"—there is no longer the slightest doubt of it . . .

THE EYE OF SHAFTI

by JAMES POWELL

THE TEMPLE OF THE GODDESS Shafti—Shafti the Creator and the Destroyer, Shafti the Wise One and the Fool, Shafti the Singer and the Song—stood in the city of Sakra in the foothills of the Himalayas.

Despite the terrifying appearance of the men of Sakra—they were of small stature and dark-complexioned, had hard, yellow eyes beneath their turbans, and wore cruel daggers in their waistbands—they were a gentle people. To draw one's dagger was considered to be the height of bad manners. Among these taciturn people the ever-present dagger was a means of silent communication, for to lay one's hand on its hilt in a certain way meant "How are you?" and in another way, "May Shafti bless you," and so on.

The men of Sakra were devoted to the Goddess. Once every seventy years, with the return of Halley's Comet (known to the people as "The Tongue of the Goddess"), they would assemble in the temple and hear the bronze mouth of Shafti utter some short command which they would hasten to obey.

But in the years between the appearances of the Comet, the Goddess was left to herself in the damp,

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dark interior of the temple whose floor was cobbled with hundreds of crawling turtles. The turtle was, of course, sacred to Shafti. She had created the garden of the world at whose geometric center stood the city of Sakra, on the back of an immense turtle swimming in an eternal sea.

And, of course, Shafti had an eye —or rather a caste mark, set in her bronze forehead. The Eye of Shafti was a sphere of lapis lazuli the size of a melon. Conveniently, the rick-rack edging of her bronze robe formed a flight of steps by which the people of Sakra could mount to the idol's shoulder and then, by standing on her enigmatic lower lip, pluck the eye from its socket.

It was the old temple priest, the Guardian of the Scrolls of Shafti, who discovered the theft. In minutes the wailing of women could be heard throughout the city and the men of Sakra were gathering into grim-faced groups. The Eye of the Goddess had been stolen, and the hunt was on.

In the long recorded history of Sakra a generation seldom passed without the Eye of the Goddess being stolen. In the beginning the culprits had been neighboring tribesmen or invading chieftains. Then, with improvements in modern transportation, the Europeans came. Whoever the thief, he must be found and put to death. For while the Eye was unrecovered and the defiler had not paid in blood for his crime, the city of Sakra lived under a curse.

The procedure of the hunt had become quite formalized. Each street in the city provided a team of two hunters. These teams acted independently of each other and were, in fact, in friendly competition—for it was traditional that the Goddess bestowed special graces on the street that recovered her Eye.

Manu, the scribe and letter writer of the Street of the Flowering Garbage, was not surprised when his neighbors chose him to be a hunter. Before the turn of the century Manu's grandfather had brought the street great honor by tracing the Eye to a lonely manor on the mist-shrouded moors of Cornwall. He had slain the defiler, a British army colonel, by forcing a hot buttered roll down his throat as he dozed by the fire over late afternoon tea.

Manu's great-grandfather had tracked the jewel and the thief, a soldier-of-fortune under the Second Empire, to a fashionable apartment on the Rue Quincampoix, Paris, where he had strangled him with one of his mistress's silk stockings. At her trial the mistress, a classically beautiful woman, had steadfastly refused to explain where she had been the night of the murder. Finally she broke down and admitted she had been unfaithful to her lover and, on the night in question, had had a rendezvous with her own

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husband. She was acquitted, of course, but was never accepted back into polite society.

In fact, the Goddess had smiled on the Street of the Flowering Garbage to such an extent that Manu's father had been able to send him away to school where he had learned to read and write in English, the language of officialdom. Thus Manu had become a scribe and was accustomed now to sit in the shade of his house before an old portable Bierschmidt-Uffizzi typewriter, composing other people's letters and filling out their government forms. Manu impressed his clients by humming in English as he worked, "i before e, except after c."

Though he was a dutiful worshiper of Shafti and knew how proud his father was that he had been chosen, Manu packed his overnight bag with a heavy heart. He was newly married and his beautiful wife had just announced that she was with child. He did not like to leave her at such a time. Then Yala, the young tinker who was to be his companion on the hunt, called for him. Together they hurried off to the meeting of the street elders.

The elders of the Street of the Flowering Garbage were meeting in secret to deliberate on which way the thief had gone. It was a complicated question. That week a Communist Bloc trade mission had visited the city briefly, a group of Norwegian, Italian, and American tourists had made an unscheduled stop when their bus broke down, and a team of Australian and New Zealand mountain climbers on their way to scale a Himalaya peak—just because, they insisted on telling everybody, it was there—had spent the night at Sakra's only hotel, the Chelsea.

The deliberations of the elders were interrupted by a constant stream of reports from their spies about the city. The Cat Street people were at the moneychanger's, converting their anna into rubles. Peach Pit Lane was buying linsey-woolseys and earmuffs in the market place. The two hunters from Bashful Peacock Street South had slipped out of the city for an unknown destination. Some of the elders called for the hasty departure of Manu and Yala.

"Departure for where?" asked others.

The chief elder spoke. "They must pray to Shafti to show them the way."

So it was that Manu and Yala spent the night kneeling among the turtles in the temple of the eyeless Shafti. There, as the first light of morning entered the tiny windows, Manu saw something glint on the floor. It was a small ball of silver paper. "Ah," he said.

Yala struck a match for him and Manu pulled the ball apart. The paper was about an inch square, silver

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on one side and white on the other. Three edges of the paper were serrated, the fourth cut straight. Yala did not make a sound as the match burned down to his fingers and went out.

Manu puzzled over the paper in the semidarkness. Then he signaled Yala who lit match after match as his companion, on hands and knees, searched the temple floor, lifting the turtles up on edge and setting them back down again respectfully. It was beneath a particularly fat and torpid turtle that Manu found the second wad of paper. It was a neatly cut-in-half wrapper from a stick of chewing gum, a spearmint flavor guaranteed to contain no sugar or calories.

"Americans chew such things," said Manu. "But Americans are very rich. Why would one of them steal the sacred Eye of Shafti?"

"I still can't understand why you stole the darn thing, Arthur," said Mrs. Tibbet as the television program broke for a commercial.

Arthur Tibbet shifted his gum to the side of his mouth. "I've been telling you for months now," he said. "They'd been robbing us blind, so I thought I'd rob them blind. It seemed like poetic justice at the time."

Tibbet had the Mamaroneck, N. Y., dealership for a well-known line of cars. Their three-week all-expense-paid tour of India had been a reward for exceeding his sales quota on a particularly unfortunate model, the Antelope, which the company had introduced that year and would discontinue the next.

Tibbet had looked forward to the trip. He wanted to visit the Shalimar and the Taj Mahal at Agra. He wanted to see the Ganges, Benares, and most of all, the Khyber Pass, about which he had read so much in adventure stories as a young boy. But the tour had been conducted at a frantic pace. They had scarcely opened their bags at one miserable hotel when they were hurrying off to another. The food disagreed with them. And every time Tibbet made a purchase he was assured by one of his fellow travelers that it was a fake or something they made just for tourists or was available somewhere else for a tenth of the cost.

Tibbet stoutly refused to believe any of this until he found *Made in Japan* stamped on his set of expensive brass gongs. From then on he imagined himself being robbed left and right. When one of his suitcases was lost somewhere in transit he was sure it had been stolen. It was an important suitcase, for Tibbet was an inveterate gum chewer and it contained most of his supply.

The breakdown of the bus in an obscure little village in the Himalayas had been the last straw. They had been stuck there for several hours and the guide had announced that because of the delay they would be forced to cut the tour short with-

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out seeing the Khyber Pass. Tibbet was furious and out for revenge.

When he entered the temple (his wife had remained outside when she saw the turtles) and found himself alone there with the statue of some goddess or other, Tibbet had been seized with a compulsion to steal the idol's eye. At least that would be real, would not have been made in Japan and—since he would pay nothing for it—would not be overpriced.

"It wasn't like you at all, Arthur," said Mrs. Tibbet.

Before Tibbet could reply, the commercial ended. He and Mrs. Tibbet watched a great deal of television and they had an unwritten law that they only talked during the commercials. A conversation begun early in the evening might continue, commercial by commercial, well into the Late Late Show as though without interruption.

Tibbet found he was no longer interested in the program, the humorous adventures of a millionaire family that loses all its money and has to move to a shack in the Tennessee hills. He was wondering, as he had many times before in the months since their return to Mamaroneck, what had possessed him to steal the idol's eye. It wasn't the sort of thing that George Washington would have done.

Tibbet had always had a deep and overwhelming admiration for the first President. In fact, he rather fancied he bore a striking resemblance to that great man, though of course he would admit, "My face is fuller and my nose is all wrong." As a young boy Tibbet had never told a lie because Washington would not have. When he met his wife-to-be he asked himself, "Would Washington have married her?" When he found himself becoming addicted to chewing gum, he asked himself if Washington would have taken up the habit. "Possibly not," he concluded. "But then he had a lot of trouble with his teeth."

But when Tibbet asked himself if Washington would have stolen the idol's eye, the answer came back an unequivocal "No!" So it saddened Tibbet that he could have acted in so vindictive and petty a way. It made a mockery of a private fantasy which his admiration of George Washington had led him into, his dream that one day, when he walked down the street, people would turn and say, "There goes Arthur Tibbet, the Father of His Country."

Tibbet shook his head sadly. And what had he gained by it? The eye was of no practical value. He had tried to use it as a paperweight on his desk but his wife insisted that it had blinked at her on at least three occasions when she tried to dust. The thing seemed too good to use as a door stopper, and so for the last few months it had sat in a glass bowl surrounded by wax apples, oranges, and pears on the sideboard facing the Tibbets' television set.

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When Mrs. Tibbet remarked how strange it was that the eye seemed to glow whenever the set was on and then go dull when they turned the set off, Tibbet explained that it was probably reflecting the light from the picture tube.

"Did I tell you I'm thinking of taking our milk from Happy Acres Dairy?" said Mrs. Tibbet as marching chocolate bars went into a precision drill on the screen.

"What's wrong with Holstein Heaven?" asked Tibbet.

"They've put this new milkman on the route who just about scares the wits out of me. He's an evil-looking man in a turban. He has a swarthy face, yellow almondy eyes that burn right through you, and he wears this dagger in his waistband."

"Has he given you any trouble?" asked Tibbet.

"No," said Mrs. Tibbet. "He's very polite."

"Well, there you are," said Tibbet. "You can't blame a man for his face." It was the kind of thing he thought George Washington might have said.

"But what about the dagger and the turban?" said Mrs. Tibbet.

"It's probably a publicity stunt of some kind," said Tibbet. "Dress your milkmen up like the Pilgrim Fathers the week of Thanksgiving or in Revolutionary uniforms around the Fourth of July. Not a bad idea at all." He thought he might even use it for his own salesmen.

The commercial finished and they both fell silent. At the station break Tibbet said, "By the way, I hope you remembered to pay the milk bill."

"Why do you ask?" said Mrs. Tibbet.

"I could be wrong," he said, "but I think I just saw the milkman's face at the window."

Manu had been working late at the office. Now he squatted in his trim blue suit and paisley tie by the embers of the open wood fire on the floor of his rented room and ate the bowl of fish and rice, both sacred to Shafti, which Yala had left warming for him.

Three months before, the gum wrapper had finally led them to Mamaroneck. From it Manu had deduced that the thief was an American, probably a bit overweight, and, because the stick had been broken exactly in two, that the man was deliberately rationing his gum, perhaps because his supply was running low.

They first picked up Tibbet's trail in the market place of the city of Jatpor where a peddler recalled a plump American who had tried to convey what he wanted by pointing to his mouth and chewing in an exaggerated fashion. "But where he went," said the peddler, "I do not know. Was the gentleman in question insane?"

In the market of the city of Dandekar the peddlers laughed uproar-

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iously when noncaloric chewing gum was explained to them. They continued to laugh until Manu and Yala laid their hands on the hilts of their daggers in a way which among their people meant "We are pleased our words amuse you."

But it was a peddler in the city of Randipoo who said, "I recall that the houseboy from the Bristol Hotel inquired after such a strange substance two weeks ago."

Impressed by the appearance of the two turbaned men, the houseboy of the Bristol Hotel was eager to tell all he knew about the American, Mr. Tibbet, who had sent him in search of chewing gum. Tibbet and his wife had flown home from Bombay the week before. The houseboy begged Manu and Yala to accept the Tibbets' American address from him, for they had lost a suitcase and asked the hotel to forward it if it turned up. When Manu and Yala laid their hands on the hilts of their daggers in a way which among their people meant "We thank you very much," the houseboy turned white and fainted.

Manu and Yala stowed away in the hold of a freighter carrying bolts of madras to New York. After many days they reached port and went over the side. Two hours later, wet and sinister, they were sitting in a car of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad on their way to Mamaroneck.

Yala had been for killing Tibbet and recovering the Eye at once. But Manu said no. The death must be by drowning and in the Month of the Dancing Sturgeon. To this Yala grudgingly agreed.

It was agreed that Yala would remain in Mamaroneck to keep Tibbet under surveillance. To meet their expenses and provide a fitting means of transportation back to Sakra for Shafti's Eye—three first-class tickets Air India—Manu would find employment in New York and become a commuter.

Because, he thought, of his knowledge of English spelling, Manu was hired at once as an account executive by one of the larger advertising agencies on Madison Avenue. The man who hired him had been impressed by Manu's terrifying appearance, his deadly gaze, and the turban and dagger. "By George," he thought, "we need this fellow on our team. He'll keep the creative people in line and scare the pants off our clients."

This, in fact, proved to be the case. The secretaries in Manu's office never glanced up from their feverish typewriters from nine to five; one yellow, side-long glance from Manu threw the creative people into paroxysms of productivity; and when, in the conference room, he submitted the fruits of his subordinates' work to the company representatives and touched the hilt of his dagger in a way which among his people meant "I hope this humble attempt pleases you," the people from Jack Horner Jellies broke into

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a cold sweat and swore it was the best campaign they had ever seen, a vice-president of Amalgamated Socks doubled the amount his company was prepared to spend on advertising that year, while the troublesome president of the Jet-White Toothpaste Company whimpered and threw himself on his knees to emphasize how much he liked Manu's slogan: "Use Jet-White or your teeth will fall out." The man who had hired Manu rubbed his hands together and congratulated himself. "I certainly know how to pick them," he said to himself.

Yala came in and squatted by the fire. He was wearing his white milkman's suit with *Holstein Heaven* stitched across the back. He waited for Manu to finish eating. Shafti imposed rigorous dietary laws on her people and each day Yala had to scour the supermarkets to find acceptable foods. But poor Manu, working in Manhattan, had to go into Central Park each noon, wring a pigeon's neck, and roast it on a spit over a fire of branches. A rigorous dietary but a completely unsatisfactory lunch.

When Manu had eaten the last morsel, Yala spoke indignantly. "The Eye of the Goddess is in a bowl of wax fruit," he said.

"I know," said Manu.

"It is a sacrilege," said Yala. "We must kill him and recover the Eye."

Manu said nothing.

"If we wait any longer," said Yala, "other hunters may find him."

Manu shook his head. His beautiful wife had written him that the Cat Street detectives were in Siberia, the Peach Pit Lane team was searching among the fjords of Norway, and the two avengers from Bashful Peacock Street South had just sent home a boomerang with the words *Souvenir of Sydney, Australia* burned into it.

However, she had also written that the curse of the Goddess lay heavy on the city. Sakra's soccer team was in a severe losing streak and something like the Dutch Elm disease had attacked the bushes of the neighboring tea plantations and an epidemic of hangnail was sweeping the city. Manu felt compassion for his people but it did not alter his resolution. "We must wait until the Month of the Dancing Sturgeon."

Manu had his reasons. The Scrolls of the Goddess Shafti which were in the keeping of the temple priest were wonderful documents. Manu knew them well and loved them because they explained the bewildering diversity of people in the world. Man lived, died, and was reborn. But his reincarnation was based not on how he had lived but on the time and manner of his death. If, for example, a man died in the Month of the Celluloid Dog he would be reincarnated as a man of the English Tongue. If he died in the Month of the Celluloid Dog by falling from a great height he would be reborn as an English-speaking Canadian; if he landed on

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his head he would spend his next life as an English-speaking Canadian plumber; and so on. Thus Shafti had said when she dictated the scrolls thousands of years before and thus Manu believed.

Manu was a gentle person. But he knew Tibbet must die for his crime against the Goddess. But his death, Manu had decided, must come about by drowning in the Month of the Dancing Sturgeon, for it was in that month that Shafti had conceived of creating the world, and water had come from her tears of laughter when she contemplated the exquisiteness of her idea.

Thus those who died in the Month of the Dancing Sturgeon by drowning were reincarnated as members of Manu's own people, the beloved of the Goddess. Killing Tibbet in this way, Manu would be doing him a service rather than an injury.

Finally the Month of the Dancing Sturgeon arrived, but a convenient way of drowning Tibbet did not. Mamaroneck, as everyone knows, is on Long Island Sound. But Tibbet neither sailed nor swam. In fact, he seldom saw the sound from one year to the next. Near the railway station, as everyone knows, is a small stream. But Tibbet hardly ever took the train.

"And besides," said Manu, "the water of the stream is too shallow."

"In the bathtub, then," said Yala.

Manu shook his head. "Then we would have to kill his wife as well. How has she offended the Goddess?"

Yala hung his head. He was homesick for Sakra and despondent over the losses of its soccer team.

"Shafti will show us the way," said Manu optimistically.

In the evenings when Manu came back from Madison Avenue, he and Yala would lurk about in the bushes outside the Tibbet house or peer in through the windows. This lurking and peering were parts of the ritual Shafti had prescribed, particularly on stormy nights.

One evening as they squatted beneath the partly opened window of the Tibbet living room, Manu nodded toward the noise of a breakfast food commercial and said, "How strangely like our Goddess Shafti is this television set."

Yala, who had noticed the same thing but rejected it as blasphemous, shook his head indignantly. "The eye in its forehead is square and ugly," he insisted.

"But like our own Shafti, it commands," said Manu.

At that moment the Tibbets began to talk about having been invited for an evening of dancing at the Robert V. Larkin, Jrs.

"Ah," said Yala. "I deliver milk to the Robert V. Larkin, Jrs. They have a swimming pool."

"Ah," said Manu.

Carrying a tray of drinks, Yala

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moved conscientiously among the guests in the living room or out on the patio by the pool. He would stop before each person, bow slightly, offer his tray, and then touch the hilt of his dagger in a way which among his people meant "Please accept one of these unworthy items." Few refused.

Mrs. Robert V. Larkin, Jr. was delighted at the way the party was going, with everyone drinking so much and enjoying themselves. Of course, as she might have expected, Guy Crabtree had crashed the party. She hadn't invited Guy because he always got impossibly drunk and danced with a lamp shade on his head or did his imitation of a duck. There he was now, waddling around and quacking among the dancers on the patio.

But Mr. Tibbet himself hadn't really got into the spirit of things. Nothing his wife had said could coax him out of his corner in the living room to mix a little or have a nice dance by the pool. Poor Tibbet hadn't been the same since their trip to India. He hardly ever talked about George Washington.

Yala slipped into the shadows around the patio and crept to the dark end of the pool beyond the lights from the house. There, down in the black, well-chlorinated water, Manu was waiting for him. By now Yala ought to have pushed Tibbet into the pool as if by accident and then Manu, swimming underwater, would have held the man beneath the surface. "But he sits in the living room and will not come out," Yala reported.

"Who is this other one, this dancer?" asked Manu.

"This is Guy Crabtree," said Yala, nodding toward the duck imitator who was now dancing by himself at the edge of the pool.

"Ah," said Manu, and whispered into his coworker's ear.

Yala recovered his tray and moved around the patio until he was at the dancing Crabtree's side. With a deft motion of his hip, Yala knocked the man into the pool and then quickly disappeared among the guests.

Crabtree came to the surface sputtering and furious. A laughing crowd had gathered at the edge of the pool. When good old Wally Kettering shouted, "I thought a duck could swim, Guy," Crabtree reached up, grabbed Kettering's ankles, and pulled him down into the water. Then a laughing Marybeth Von Horne pushed Edgar Allan Smith into the pool and somebody pushed Marybeth.

In another instant people were jumping or being pushed into the pool left and right. The Tibbets came out onto the patio to watch the show. As he stood there laughing on the edge of the pool, Tibbet himself was pushed from behind. It might have been that strange little waiter with the turban and dagger, thought Mrs. Larkin, reflecting later on what had happened.

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Manu shot out of his dark corner like a shark and dragged Tibbet to the bottom of the pool. Holding him there, Manu recited a prayer that the man's new life would be a happy one.

In all the gaiety and confusion it was half an hour before anyone noticed Tibbet's dead body floating in the pool. By that time Manu and Yala had recovered the Eye of the Goddess from the bowl of wax fruit, had wrapped it reverently in the entertainment section of *The New York Times,* Sunday edition, and were on a train for Grand Central Station. By the time a doctor had pronounced Tibbet dead, Manu and Yala were aboard an Air India jet on the first leg of their return trip to Sakra.

The temple of Shafti was crowded for the ceremony of restoration. A place of honor had been cleared of turtles for Manu, Yala, and the elders of the Street of the Flowering Garbage. Manu's beautiful wife could not be present to witness this proud moment. Two days before his arrival she had given birth to a fine baby boy and was still confined to her bed.

But the soccer team was there, all flushed with victory in their bright uniforms and knee socks. At the exact moment that Manu and Yala had recovered the Eye of the Goddess, the soccer team, half a world and many time zones away, had come from far behind to defeat their most skillful rivals. And at that same moment the diseased leaves had dropped from the tea bushes and healthy buds had appeared. And at that same moment the scourge of hangnail had been lifted from the city.

The crowd was hushed as the old temple priest mounted the steps formed by the rickrack edging of the Goddess' robe and placed the lapis lazuli Eye back in its socket.

"Look down on your people again and bless us, O Shafti," cried the priest. "We long for your tongue"—he meant Halley's Comet —"to return once more so that you may make your will known to us."

At that moment the Eye glowed and a voice came from the bronze throat of the Goddess. Shafti spoke. For during the months Shafti's Eye had spent in the bowl of wax fruit the Goddess had learned from her square-eyed sister-goddess, the Tibbet television set, how to make demands on her people.

From that day forward Shafti commanded her people four times each hour. And the people obeyed.

What did it matter that they were poor? When the Goddess commanded them to buy such and such an automobile, the people of Sakra were happy to work harder, earn the money, and buy it. Shafti's word was law.

And what did it matter that few of them could drive? Once a day, in Shafti's name, they sat in their parked cars, and as Shafti had ad-

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monished (adding that this was a public service announcement), they fastened their seat belts. To their elaborate dietary laws was now added the consumption of an imported peanut butter (the chunky kind), a soft drink, a canned soup, and instant mashed potatoes, all in the brands specified by the Goddess. To their rituals of purification were added a detergent, a bath soap, and a shampoo all of which the Goddess named by name. Their homes became filled with household appliances waiting patiently for the introduction of electric power.

But the simplicity of life in Sakra did not change, nor did the people become caught up in material things. Each day when they took their buffered or unbuffered aspirin, each evening when they cursed the chaos of Brand X, they did so out of religious piety and because they loved their Goddess.

Soon the common greeting in Sakra became: "What does the Blessed Shafti wish us to run down to our neighborhood store or friendly supermarket and buy today?" Once, when Manu greeted Yala in this way, Yala replied, "Thus says the Divine Shafti with respect to toothpaste: 'Use Jet-White or your teeth will fall out.'"

"Ah," said Manu.

On his third birthday Manu's son came of age. The ceremony was an elaborate and time-honored one to which Manu invited all his friends.

The young boy came into the room wearing the charms and vestments sacred to the Goddess. He bowed to the circle of guests and then removed the dollar pocket watch which, according to the ritual for all male children among the people of Sakra, was hung around his neck on a string from the moment he was born. He handed the watch to the old temple priest, bowed, and left the room.

The old priest squatted in the middle of the circle of guests, held the watch on its edge against the floor, and drew the sacred hammer from the folds of his garment. He struck the edge of the watch sharply with the hammer, keeping the case together with his fingers. When the traditional nine strokes of the hammer had been given, he laid the watch face down on the floor. This was the high point of the ceremony, for the squatting priest would now remove the back of the watch and from the position of the loose wheels and springs, he would augur the future of the boy.

The priest removed the back and peered down into the wreckage. Then he fell back on his heels in amazement. "Shafti be praised," he exclaimed. "He will be a great man. He will be called The Father of His Country."

"Ah," said the guests.

"Ah," said Manu, touching the hilt of his dagger in a way which among his people meant "I am very proud."

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The case was as good as cracked, but they put O'Malley on it anyway. After all, it was murder and $50,000 worth of diamonds had been stolen, so there was no harm in double-checking . . . one of those deceptively simple O'Malley yarns full of bad grammar and good police work . . .

TELL 'EM AT HEADQUARTERS

by WILLIAM MacHARG

"WHAT WE GOT NOW," SAID O'Malley, "is a jewelry salesman got murdered and robbed. They tell me they got the case as good as solved, but still they put me on it. What good I should go around and ask a lot of questions when they already got the answers?

"This was a salesman named Alliday and he worked for a jewelry house downtown called Morant and Company. Well, they had to send fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds to a jewelry store in the Bronx, so Alliday took 'em in a cab and another guy went with him.

"When they was in Central Park the driver heard a shot fired in his cab and slowed up to find out what was wrong, and the other guy jumped out and run away into the bushes. A lot of people and cars got around, and they got a cop, and the cop went in the taxi with Alliday to the hospital, but by the time they got there the guy was dead."

"Have they caught the man who did the shooting?"

"They got one they think is him. Burrell his name is, and he was a friend of Alliday's. They got him at headquarters and the taxi guy, too, who they're holding for a witness."

"Well, what's to be worked on, then," I asked, "if they've already caught him?"

"That's what I told you in the first place."

"Did they get back the diamonds?"

"He had got rid of the diamonds and the gun. I got to go and talk with him, but I don't expect he'll tell me anything."

We went to headquarters and saw Burrell. He was an undersized young fellow of unpleasant appearance and had, I thought, a particularly evil face.

"How long did you know Alliday?" O'Malley asked him.

"A couple of months."

"Got acquainted with him, did you, because you knew his business

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and thought you'd stick him up?"

"I was at a movie when this thing happened."

"Yeah, I heard you said that. You're out of luck that there don't none of the attendants at the picture theater remember seeing you."

The taxi driver's name was Durman. He was about twenty-five years old and looked like any other taxi driver.

"You're sure this Burrell is the guy that was in your cab?" O'Malley asked him.

"He looks like the guy," the taxi driver answered, "but I never seen him but that one time, so maybe I couldn't really swear to him."

"You tell us about Burrell getting in the cab."

"Why, I was waiting in the cab when Alliday came out of the office building, and this other guy—Burrell, if he's the right one—was standing near the corner. He seen Alliday and came up and spoke to him, and they talked for a minute, friendly, and then both got into the cab. They kept on talking but I didn't pay attention or even hear what they was saying; and in the park I heard the shot."

He described the rest of the event just as O'Malley had already told it to me.

"Say listen," he said just as we were leaving him, "how long you guys going to keep me here?"

"I got nothing to do with that," O'Malley told him.

"Well, somebody has. You treat a guy that's just a witness like he had done something wrong. I got a wife, and she's worrying her heart out and the cops are bothering her."

"They got no business to do that," O'Malley said. "I'll see they quit it. You got any message you want I should give your wife?"

"If you see her, tell her to stop worrying."

"Get anything from either of them?" I asked after we had left them.

"Not a thing, and now I got to go and see Morant and Company, and it ain't likely I'll get anything there either."

We went downtown. Morant and Company's offices were on an upper floor of a tall building, and Morant himself, the senior partner, saw us.

"Anything unusual, Mr. Morant," O'Malley asked, "about the way them diamonds were being sent?"

"Nothing whatever. It was all in accordance with our usual custom. We continually receive requests from jewelers to show them diamonds from which they can make selections, and one of our salesmen takes the diamonds to them in a cab. It was unusual, however, that Alliday took anyone with him. He was supposed to go alone."

"Yeah? Well, this time it seems he didn't. I don't suppose you know what time he left here?"

"We know exactly. We keep a record when stones are sent out and returned. I'll get it for you."

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Morant sent for the record. Alliday had left the company's offices at 3:07.

"I see," said O'Malley. "So it was this way: Alliday took the diamonds, went down in the elevator to the street, found a cab—"

"Oh, not that way at all," Morant told him. "We don't care to have a salesman with a pocketful of diamonds wandering about the streets looking for a cab. One of the boys went down and got the cab for him."

"I'd like to see that boy."

The boy proved to be a frank-faced and intelligent young fellow.

"You see anybody hanging around the building entrance like they was watching for Alliday when you went down to get the cab?" O'Malley asked him.

"I didn't notice anybody in particular. There were plenty of people in the entrance and on the street, of course."

"Tell us how you done it, son."

"Why, the way I always do it. There's a cab stand at the corner and I went and got a cab and came back in it and told the man to wait, and then I came up and told Mr. Alliday it was there, and he went down to it."

"Know the cab driver?"

"By sight. He's carried salesmen plenty times before."

We went down to the street. There was a cigar store in the building entrance and O'Malley went into it and telephoned headquarters.

"What did you tell headquarters?" I inquired of him.

"Told 'em I wasn't learning nothing. Well, here we take a cab."

We went to the cab stand on the corner and got a cab, and O'Malley looked at his watch as we got into it. Then we drove north and along Fifth Avenue and turned into the park.

"Here's where it happened," O'Malley told me finally.

The murderer had picked out an excellent place for it. Bushes on both sides hid the road, and there was less traffic than on most of the park driveways.

We got out and spent some time examining the locality, but we didn't find anything. Then we drove to the hospital and, on reaching it, O'Malley again looked at his watch.

"Okay," he stated. "Alliday left Morant's at three-seven and they got him here, according to the hospital records, at five minutes past four. It's about the same time of day and traffic is about the same, and he done the trip in one minute less than we did, but we might have spent more time in the park."

"What does that show?" I asked.

"Shows the taxi driver told the truth and didn't go nowhere but where he said he did. That being the case, I guess I'll give his message to his wife."

We drove to Durman's apartment. It was in an unattractive building in the Bronx. A smell of cooking greeted us. Mrs. Durman

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was in the kitchen, cooking a chop and some potatoes, and a pot of soup was simmering on the stove. She was about twenty-two years old and poorly dressed, but I have never seen a more beautiful woman.

"I got a message from your husband," O'Malley told her. "He said to tell you not to worry."

"I'm not worrying. But the police keep coming here and I don't like it because of the neighbors."

"They got no business to. I'll put a stop to it."

He sat down as if he wanted to keep up the conversation and I was amused to see that he was attracted to the woman. They talked for a while.

"You wouldn't want to go to a movie tonight?" O'Malley asked her bashfully.

"Not with my husband being held."

I was sorry for her, but I felt like laughing at O'Malley.

"Well, O'Malley," I kidded him after we had got outside, "you certainly fell for that woman. It's the first time I ever saw you fall for one of them, but I don't blame you. She's a knockout. Put that girl in the right clothes and the right surroundings and she'd have it over all of them."

"That's right," O'Malley agreed. "But it wouldn't do me no good if I was to fall for her, because she's married to this taxi guy. It's a pity he don't make enough to dress her up."

We parted and I did not see him till the next day.

"Anything new?" I asked him.

"Sure. They found the gun in the park where the guy threw it."

"Fingerprints on it?"

"It was rained on. They tried to trace it by the number, but it was stole a month ago from the guy that had a right to own it. So there's no clue."

"You better trace it," I urged, "because it will be the best evidence you can get against Burrell."

"You're smart," O'Malley said.

"How did they connect Burrell with the murder in the first place?" I inquired. "You haven't told me that."

"That was simple. Alliday wouldn't have taken nobody in the cab with him unless he knew him, and this taxi driver gave a pretty good description of the guy. They looked for who among Alliday's friends answered that description, and Burrell did and couldn't prove where he was when the murder happened."

"They got the right man," I declared. "I knew that when I looked at him. Did you take Mrs. Durman to a movie?" I asked teasingly.

"I went out there but she wouldn't go with me. I'm going out there now."

There was a uniformed policeman in front of Durman's door and Mrs. Durman asked at once the meaning of it.

"I put him there," O'Malley told

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her, "to keep the other cops away. You ain't been bothered since, have you?"

"No," she admitted, "but it makes me wonder what the other tenants in the building think about it."

"I'll have him taken off then."

Everything in the place was exactly as it had been the day before. Mrs. Durman was getting lunch ready and soup was simmering on the stove.

"You're certainly some cook!" O'Malley told her. "Your soup ain't healthy for a hungry man to smell. It makes him hungrier. You wouldn't let me taste it, would you?"

"I'll give you some," she offered.

"Don't bother. I'll get it myself."

Before she could prevent him he had dipped a ladleful from the bottom of the pot, inspecting it closely. Then he took the kettle from the stove and following his directions I helped him strain the soup through a dish towel and saw unset diamonds glistening among the meat and vegetables that were left.

"Were you kidding me into believing that Burrell had done it, O'Malley?" I asked, after we had taken Mrs. Durman to headquarters, "or did you believe it yourself?"

"Sure I believed it," he replied. "The first I thought it might not be that way was when Morant and Company's boy says Durman had drove their salesmen on them trips before. Then when I seen Mrs. Durman I got sure of it. You said yourself she'd be a knockout if she had the right clothes. She knew that a lot better'n you and figured she'd get 'em any way she could.

"Durman knew that when he carried salesmen on them trips they were loaded up with jewels and him and his wife fixed the job up between 'em. After the boy had got Durman's cab and Durman was waiting for Alliday to come down, he went in the cigar store and telephoned his wife, and she went and waited for him in the place they had picked out in the park. Of course there wasn't nobody but Durman and Alliday in the cab. Durman knocked Alliday off. Mrs. Durman was there and he slipped her the diamonds and the gun before the crowd begun to gather.

"Mrs. Durman threw away the gun, so it couldn't be connected with 'em, and Durman took the cop into his cab and beat it for the hospital to tell his story. He's a smart guy, and so he described as the third man in the cab a fellow he'd once seen with Alliday. It was his luck that Burrell didn't have no alibi."

"But what made you think the diamonds were in the soup?"

"Why, there was always the question, if Burrell done the job, whether Durman had been in on it with him, and if he was, Burrell might have took the diamonds out to Durman's place. So they searched Dur-

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man's place but they didn't find nothing. I guess Mrs. Durman didn't expect it would be searched, so she put the diamonds in the soup when the cops came because it was the quickest and safest place she could think to hide 'em.

"After I got the hunch Durman might have done the job alone, you and I went out and talked with Mrs. Durman and I looked the place over and I couldn't see nowhere in them two rooms where the stones could have been hidden that the guys searching wouldn't have found 'em. If I could have got her to go to a movie we'd have searched the place again.

"I went out to her place three different times of day, wondering whereabouts the stones could be, and every time the soup was cooking on the stove. That didn't seem natural."

"You're a very clever cop, O'Malley."

"You tell 'em at headquarters, will you?" he replied. "I've been trying a long time now to get somebody to think that, and I ain't found nobody that will believe me yet."

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Whether you play golf or not, you will be deeply interested in the 4th Tee Murderer's sad story. Sad? No, more like profoundly distressing. The Murderer himself considered the circumstances as clearly justifying homicide; indeed, what happened on the course at Huggins' Hollow is a tale that would sicken all but the stoutest—of golfers . . .

THE GREAT GOLF MYSTERY

by ROBERT J. TILLEY

THE 4TH TEE MURDERER WAS A small man with rimless glasses, a mouse-like mustache, and a nervous twitch of the left nostril. This last acquisition was the only outward sign of emotion he had displayed since his trial, an understandably tension-fraught affair at which he had reluctantly been found guilty by twelve low-handicap men; and a concerted murmur of sympathy and admiration had sounded throughout the barred corridors of the prison on the morning he was taken to the death cell.

His lawyer visited him later that day, a trace of understandable embarrassment detectable in his demeanor. A previous commitment to participate in the local pro-am tournament had necessitated his delegating the case to a new, and, it now appeared, incompetent subordinate, and while his absence had been excusable he felt that common courtesy demanded he put in an appearance, if only to say goodbye. He was himself still a young man, but a nasty slice and a great deal of time spent in bunkers had matured him beyond his years, and his heart went out to the bowed figure he found listlessly toying with a putter, a pile of treasured score cards beside him.

The lawyer murmured a greeting, and seated himself.

The 4th Tee Murderer glanced up from his reverie, blinked, and twitched his left nostril at him.

"Ah, my dear fellow," he said. His voice was low, but a hint of his old defiance could be heard beneath the dispirited tones. "Good of you to come and see me off like this. Hope I haven't put you out in any way."

"No, no," the lawyer said, greatly relieved. His client's lack of animosity plainly labeled him a man of superior intellect and deep understanding, one who fully appreciated that you can't win them all. The lawyer's nervousness vanished, and his features assumed a look of somber commiseration. It was true that he had been booked to play in a foursome that afternoon, but he

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felt that all things considered it would have been churlish to have mentioned it.

"My only wish is that I could do more. At times such as these, one experiences a sense of inadequacy comparable only to one's earliest youth, when the hook, slice, and top were one's shameful everyday companions." He coughed delicately. "Are you quite sure there is nothing that I can do? A fresh supply of practice balls? A new Swing-Rite Practice Companion with Double-Strength Air-Flite ball on Triple-Strength elastic, perhaps?"

The 4th Tee Murderer laughed bitterly.

"And what benefit would I derive from these things, these painful reminders of all that has made life worthwhile? They would only serve to make the end even more unendurable, though mind you," the Murderer went on hastily, "there might still be time to correct an unfortunate tendency to hook slightly with the dashed niblick."

He paused thoughtfully, then sank back into his former state of despair. "Ah, well. A flaw remains—perhaps symbolic of the unattainable perfection that we all seek and fail to find in this brief but blessed span, when we stride on springy turf—occasionally soggy, I grant you, especially in June, July, and August—learning to drive straight and true down the fairway of life, resisting the lure of bunker and the snare of rough, purifying ourselves little by little as we grope fumblingly toward par, and then—the Great Beyond."

"Amen," the lawyer said humbly.

The Murderer fixed him with a look of grim melancholy.

"Let me tell you the full bitter story," he said. "Let me tell you about the murder I committed on the fourth tee at Huggins' Hollow, the indubitably justifiable homicide that has resulted in my present incarceration and forthcoming demise. And I hope you have a strong stomach, for it is a tale that would sicken all but the stoutest. I speak metaphorically, you understand." He paused courteously. "If you can spare the time, of course. Sure I'm not keeping you from anything?"

"No, no," the lawyer said. "Not at all. I shall be most interested. As a matter of fact, what with one thing and another, the details of the case—" He coughed, eyed the bright sunlight that showed beyond the barred window, and suppressed a small inward sigh. "Pray proceed."

"It began," the Murderer said heavily, "as many other mornings have begun. I rose, showered, shaved, dressed, and proceeded downstairs to breakfast alone, leaving my wife to her slumber, or so I thought. And there I was, studying the previous day's match scores in the *Daily Golfer,* about to sip my fourth cup of tea, when it happened. There was a bellow in my

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ear of "SurpI-Ise!"—and I chokingly emerged from my cup to find my wife beside me, fully attired in—golfing clothes!"

The Murderer was pale, and his hands tautened on the shaft of the putter that he held, employing, the lawyer noted absently but approvingly, an orthodox reverse overlapping grip.

"You will understand my dismay when I tell you that in our fifteen years of married life she had flatly refused to exhibit the faintest glimmer of interest in the finer things, contenting herself merely with running the house, painting impressionist landscapes which she sold for disgustingly large sums of money, writing best-selling novels and an occasional smash-hit musical, composing a symphony now and then, managing her dress salon, and so on. A wasted life," the Murderer said sadly.

"However, it had happened at last. In her insatiable search for the new, the untried, she had finally decided to inflict herself on the most testing field of endeavor yet devised by man, confident in her butterfly fashion that she would sail blithely round in par as soon as she was let loose upon the hallowed ground.

"I pleaded, arguing the necessity for lessons, the need to parade one's naked unfitness before the humbling eye of the pro; but she would have none of it. She sulked, she whined. She said that I had ulterior motives in wishing her not to play. She said that I didn't love her. She said that she would go home to her mother."

The Murderer sighed. "You may wonder at this point why I failed to settle for what would unarguably have been the lesser of two evils, the sad truth being that despite her inherently shallow nature and lack of imagination and initiative, I loved my wife. And despite my certain foreknowledge of the dark happenings ahead, I clung desperately to a vain hope that she would fall prey to some disease, preferably noncontagious, en route to the club, or fall and break an arm or leg before it became possible for her to shame me with her first attempted swing.

"Alas, it was not to be. At length I capitulated, and it was with a leaden heart that I watched her, one hour later, grasp my driver in a vise-like grip and address her ball for the very first time. The stance that she had chosen, despite repeated appeals on my own part, would be difficult to sum up in a phrase. Her toes were turned inward, her knees bent outward, her arms stiffly crooked at the elbow, and her posterior was as kickably projected as any man less iron-willed than myself could have wished. The total effect was similar to a clumsily stuffed penguin I had once seen as a child, an item that had afforded me considerable amusement at the time but now

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only caused me to reflect deeply on the tasteless humor of adolescence.

"She lifted her head toward the hole, presumably to verify that it had not been moved while she adopted her position, then swung the club—a sudden violent movement that was obviously intended to catch the ball while its thoughts were elsewhere. There was a muffled click, a square foot of turf sailed past my left ear, and I was astounded to see the ball limp to a halt over a hundred yards away, positioned directly in the center of the fairway.

"I made haste to congratulate her on her success. To strike a golf ball at one's very first attempt is a quite remarkable achievement in itself, and its presence on the fairway instead of somewhere to the extreme left or right of the tee mercifully meant that we could immediately put distance between ourselves and the clubhouse, where horrified gazes were plainly visible at the window. I played my drive, a somewhat hurried affair that found its way into some long stuff over to the right, and we then proceeded to where my wife's ball lay.

"Halting beside it and casting a cursory glance toward the distant flag, she stated that as she now had the general feel of things and if I would be so good as to pass her one of the shorter clubs, which looked to be a little more her size, she would proceed to knock the ball down the hole from where we stood. In vain I pointed out the sheer physical impossibility of her covering a distance of two hundred yards with a seven, eight, or nine iron, but she brushed aside my pleas, impatiently snatched the eight from the bag, and once again addressed her ball.

"Here," the Murderer said, following a slight pause during which he aged visibly (his hair turned almost white), "we come to the point in the affair at which I felt the first teetering of my reason. As she swung—a clumsy, ill-coordinated affair that made her initial stroke look like a bit of business by Pavlova on one of her better nights—her left foot skidded inward on the turf, the club struck the ball, and simultaneously she pitched in the direction of the hole, regaining her balance only at the very last possible moment. With the full weight of her body behind the stroke the ball lifted, traveled in a graceful arc, the apex of which was approximately six feet from the ground, landed just short of the green, rolled twenty feet in a geometrically faultless straight line—and vanished into the hole."

"Blessed indeed are the doings of the Lord," the lawyer said emotionally. He was a church-going man and knew the value of prayer, teaching one as it did to keep one's head down. "She was shown the Way."

"Blessed my bloodshot eyeball," the Murderer said bitterly. "Dashed

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fishy, if you ask me. There was this woman, who'd never handled a club before in her dashed life, holing out with an eagle two on a hole that I've never been able to do in less than par, and using the wrong club to boot."

He gnashed his teeth for a moment. "Dashed fishy. It was almost as though—oh, well, never mind. When I recovered from the shock, I congratulated her again. I told her that by the greatest good luck and assisted by a series of coincidences that made evolution look like mere child's play in comparison, she had just broken the club record for the first hole. Her reply, voiced petulantly, was that she had been perfectly confident of the outcome of her shot, and that she was disappointed only in the fact that it exposed my attempts to dissuade her from employing the club she had used as merely a clumsy attempt to ruin her game."

The lawyer tutted disapprovingly.

"Tut you may," the Murderer said, "as would any civilized man. Stunned to silence, I holed out with a miserable six and numbly followed her to the second tee. You know the hole, of course—a short affair liberally dotted with bunkers of the most vicious kind and completed by a cunningly positioned tree a little to the left of the tee. I watched in stricken silence as she again wrenched her limbs into the macabre pose that I had witnessed on the first tee, paused only to observe that the buttercups appeared to be a trifle early this year, then swiped at the ball.

"You could call it a slosh, if you prefer, or even a bash, but in no way could you label that fearsome wielding of the club a correct golfing stroke. The ball vanished, and it was only by craning my neck that I found it again, a diminishing speck that moved upward in an almost vertical line, curved sharply, then descended at frightful velocity to vanish into the topmost foliage of the tree. There was a sharp report, a shower of leaves, and the ball reappeared bouncing lightly onto the green, where it stopped three inches short of the hole."

"Merciful Heaven!" the lawyer exclaimed. His face was pale.

"Merciful my ingrowing toenail," the Murderer said querulously. "If Heaven is so dashed merciful, what's it up to when it allows such incredible luck to fall on someone who has always laughed at the mere mention of the game and whose demeanor indicated that she still considered it no great shakes and somewhat easier than falling off a log? Merciful Heaven, indeed," the Murderer said, chafing visibly. "Anyway, to cut down on the painful details, I hooked my tee shot, took five to get out of a bunker, and finished up with an eight for a bogey three."

The lawyer made incredulous noises.

"Quite so," the Murderer said.

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"We proceeded to the third tee, the four-hundred yarder, where, my rapidly failing grip on a sense of reality assured me, it would be quite impossible for her to achieve a distance of more than a hundred yards or so—particularly in view of the fact that she had insisted on retaining the eight iron, a club, she said, that seemed to suit her style of play. The chances of her duplicating the incredible shot she had performed on the first hole were so minute as to be laughable, and yet it was with jangling nerves that I watched her as she squared up to the ball, paused only to comment that the daisies, too, appeared to be coming along nicely, and swung down on it.

"The result of this stroke," the Murderer continued, his eyes glazed at the memory, "can only be described as staggering, astounding, incredible, unbelievable, impossible, inconceivable, unheard of, and beyond the bounds of reason. The ball took off, rose to a distance of eighteen inches above ground level, and maintained this height for approximately two hundred and seventy-five yards. It fell at last and rolled an additional fifty before coming to rest, perfectly positioned on a slight incline that bisects the fairway at that point.

"It was a full minute before I could gather my rapidly disintegrating wits sufficiently to play my own shot. My drive, incredibly under the circumstances, was a moderately good one, and it was only after I had played my second shot and we had proceeded some distance down the fairway that I detected something distinctly odd about my wife's ball. We eventually reached it, and one glance was sufficient to explain its fantastic performance.

"The bottom edge of the club had sliced cleanly into the cover, almost removing it but failing to sever the final three-quarters of an inch. The ball had then, of course, as any simpleton familiar with ffoulkes-ffarrington's Law could tell you, simply done a quarter backspin, followed by a quarter sidespin, opened out, and glided to the spot where it finished up.

"Wonderful thing, aerodynamics," the Murderer said thoughtfully. "Did you know that half a banana, sliced vertically, will fly from Dublin to New York if ejected from a small-bore cannon at a speed of one hundred and ninety-three point nought nought nought seven miles per hour? Allowing for reasonable winds, of course. Nothing too blowy.

"Anyway, there it confronted us, the pitiable remains of what minutes before had been an excellent golf ball, quite unplayable now, of course. I explained to my wife that she was entitled to a replacement, and following her somewhat reluctant agreement I removed the corpse and placed a new ball where it had rested. She eyed it in a suspicious

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sort of way, rather as one might view a cigar that one has strong reason to suspect is loaded; but eventually she aimed her club and played her second shot.

"Again her left foot skidded inward, again she toppled in the direction of the hole, this time landing heavily on her side, at which point there was a sickening yet somehow heart-warming crack. I choked back my eager inquiry and watched the ball. Once again, unbelievably, it rose to a height of eighteen inches, sped toward the green, glanced off the lip of an intervening bunker, rose gracefully into the air, then sank out of sight, shortly reappearing as it rolled to a gentle halt a mere inch from the hole.

"On turning my blurred and unbelieving gaze to my wife, to ascertain whether it was her neck, arm, leg, or simply her wrist that had been fractured, I was staggered to find her once again on her feet, angrily dusting herself down, the jagged remains of the club in her nondusting hand."

The lawyer made sounds of distress.

"You said it," the Murderer said. "A club with which I had chipped my way out of many a tight corner, especially at the club dances when that confounded Mrs. hhuntingtonhhereford got me lined up in her sights. She couldn't resist small men. Compact, she called me. Sturdy, too, as I recall. However." The Murderer dashed away a tear—whether for the demise of his number eight iron or the memory of missed opportunities at the club dances, the lawyer couldn't be sure.

"My wife brutally brandished the remains at me, loudly decrying the manufacturer who had supplied what she described as a flimsy excuse for a golfing stick. I was too heartbroken to reply, too ravaged by a bitter and lasting grief to do anything other than dumbly take the body from her careless grasp. I completed the hole with a further —" the Murderer winced as he forced the hateful figures between clenched teeth—"seven strokes, but I was beyond caring by this time, chipping clumsily, putting like a lost soul.

"I was like a man in the grip of a nightmare as I followed her to the fourth and fatal tee. There, the fairway coiled before us, a fiendishly ingenious piece of golfing architecture, the sight of which has never failed to shatter the confidence of all but the half-witted and the short-sighted. Bunkers to the left, trees to the right, and a yawning chasm bisecting the fairway, the lip of its farther slope a full two hundred and five yards, two feet, nine and seven thirty-seconds of an inch away.

"Many golfers, as you know, have retreated gibbering from that spot, incurably afflicted with the Fourth Tee Twitch, that dreaded malady which renders the imbibing of

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liquid impossible other than through a straw, and induces in the victim a compulsion to buy and store unreasonably vast quantities of golf balls. My wife merely cast a nonchalant glance at this bleakly intimidating terrain, made a comment to the effect that it was about time that it was tidied up a bit, and contorted herself into her customary striking stance.

"Until this point her performance, fantastic though it had undoubtedly been, was not entirely beyond the bounds of reason. Her use of the club, while in itself undeniably horrifying to the sensitive observer, had resulted in nothing more than a remarkable series of freak shots, all physically possible if not exactly probable in such unprecedented profusion. She had also, of course, been more than fortunate in that certain static objects arranged for the purpose of creating hazards to impede the player had instead perversely aided her to achieve the incredible results I had witnessed on that grim and godless morning. It is true that the odds against such a sequence of improbabilities are zillions to one against —ninety-eight zillion or thereabouts, I make it—but they are, at least, minimally possible.

"However, at this stage in the proceedings it was at last made abundantly clear that all logic had deserted this earthly realm, and that chaos, cold and uncaring, now reigned in its stead.

"The raven," the Murderer said, with an abrupt change of gear that had the lawyer floundering for a moment or two, "is traditionally a symbol of evil, a line of thought to which I now subscribe with the utmost vigor, for I was about to witness a demonstration that bracketed it once and for all with those things that are so obviously thrust upon us by the boys downstairs. Things like the fourteenth hole at Snidgely Common," the Murderer said broodingly.

"Anyway, she swung at the ball, an action that was accompanied by the tuneful and unmistakable snap of a disintegrating garter. With an exclamation of annoyance she cast the club from her and commenced to rummage beneath her skirt, while I, with faith suddenly re-ignited in my bosom, watched her ball rise at a limp tangent, fall to the ground a mere ten yards from where we stood, then trickle from sight into the yawning mouth of the ravine.

"And then it happened. A sinister flapping sound commenced, and before my eyes the black and malevolent figure of a raven rose from the murky depths. Clenched tightly in its claws was my wife's ball. It turned a beadily thoughtful eye in my direction, sneered visibly, then turned and flew away from where we stood, headed directly down the center of the fairway. Several yards short of the distant green it relinquished its grip on my wife's ball, which fell on level turf, bounded a

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short distance, and became stationary approximately six inches from the hole."

A deathly hush filled the small drab room, a silence that was broken at last by the lawyer's tremulous tones.

"At such times there is little one can say."

"Permit me to differ," the Murderer grated. "At such times there is a good deal one can say, and I count myself fortunate that my vocabulary is at least adequately equipped for such an occasion. As the power of speech returned, I utilized it to the full. I spoke. I employed the sum total of the invective at my command, unleashing on the elements a tirade that would not have disgraced a regimental sergeant-major whose foot has just been run over by a fifty-ton tank."

The lawyer smiled reminiscently. "Your story puts me in mind of my own reaction to recent trying circumstances. A muffed putt on the seventh only last Wednesday—"

The Murderer shook his head warningly. "To continue. As I paused to gather breath to continue my harangue, she intervened. She said she had no idea what I was talking about, that if I wished to employ disgusting language I could do so elsewhere, that I was nothing more than a rotten sport, insanely jealous of her obvious talent for a game at which I appeared to be somewhat less than competent, and that she was going home to her mother. And then," the Murderer said, his voice a low, sudden sob, "she said—It."

The lawyer winced, and summoned an inadequate tut.

"She said," the Murderer said, his voice that of a man who has heard the Devil's testament, "that it was, after all, simply a footling game, a pastime for retired bank managers and the feeble-minded. What person in his right senses, she wished to know, could actually derive enjoyment from striking a small ball with a stick that has a knob on the end, and frequently subjected to the buffeting of the elements in the process? Who, she jeeringly queried, but an adolescent numskull, retarded beyond belief, would thrill to the prospect of pursuing that same small ball for a distance of several miles, weaving from rough to hedge to bunker to ditch, exhausting both body and patience in the process and building up a bigger crop of ulcers than you could shake a stick at?

"There was more, much more, but it became simply a blur of words, a foully blasphemous sound that had to be stopped at all cost. And while red mist roiled before my eyes, it was done. I used my wedge," the Murderer said. His eyes were moist with tears. "A crisp, wristy hit, with plenty of follow-through. She felt no pain, I am sure."

His head sank on his chest, and he was silent at last.

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"You were sorely tried," the lawyer said hoarsely. He felt deeply for this man. "Under such brutally provocative circumstances, how can I say what I myself, despite the appalling prospect of having to conduct my own defense on such a charge, might have done? A rather intriguing example of this particular predicament," the lawyer said, his voice adopting a professional drone, "was the case of Crown vs. Gubbins—"

"What have I done?" the Murderer cried. The lawyer blundered to a halt, losing the thread of things. "What have I done, what have I done?"

The lawyer endeavored to soothe him. "A perfectly understandab—"

"But she was right!" the Murderer cried. He leaped to his feet, wild-eyed, and cast his putter from him with a gesture of sudden loathing. "What is it but a recreation for the shallow and childish, an obsessive drug that blinds us to the true values? The human relationship, the bond between man and man, and"—he sobbed—"man and his mate—*there* you have the true reason for existence!"

"What?" the lawyer cried, aghast.

The Murderer dispersed the pile of treasured score cards with a well-aimed kick. "I have been blind, blind! Why, when it is too late, has the truth made itself known to me? She was right! It *is* simply a footling game, a pastime for retired bank managers and the feeble-minded! What person in his right senses *would* actually derive enjoyment from striking a small ball with a stick that has a knob on the end, and frequently subjected to the buffeting of the elements in the process? Who but an adolescent numskull, retarded beyond belief—?"

He spoke on, but in the lawyer's ears it became simply a blur of words, a foully blasphemous sound that had to be stopped at all cost.

And while red mist roiled before his eyes, the lawyer reached blindly for the Murderer's discarded putter . . .

"Ghastly business, ghastly," the warden said. He coughed, distinctly ill at ease. "No, I mean, really. Er—rather unusual, too, I should have thought. Surely something with a little more loft to it—? Oh, well, no matter. What I fail to understand—ah—what has me totally baffled—er, that is to say, in a nutshell, if you follow me, why did you—ah—do it?"

The lawyer sat before the warden in his office, his eyes downcast, his face wan. A guard stood at his shoulder, the murder weapon in his hand.

The lawyer opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again, croaked, then was silent.

The warden cracked his knuckles nervously.

"Company cramping your style, possibly? Quite understandable. Embarrassed and so forth. Man in

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your position—ah—Jenkins." The guard stiffened to attention. "Might be better if you waited outside. You can leave the—ah—thing." The guard exited.

"Well, now," the warden said, leaning forward and shuffling his feet beneath the desk. "Better, eh? Free to talk, and all that." He fiddled with the putter. "Jolly nice little club, this. Very much the style of thing I was using myself a year or so back. Rather too much meat on the shaft, I found—however." He pushed it away. "You were saying?"

The lawyer opened his mouth again, croaked tentatively, then spoke in low, broken tones.

"He insisted on describing in detail the events that had resulted in his incarceration and forthcoming demise, warning me at the time that a strong stomach would be an advantage, as it was a tale that would sicken all but the stoutest. He spoke metaphorically, he assured me. It began, it seems, as many other mornings had begun—"

The warden settled back in his chair, adopting an expression of polite interest. He had, if truth be told, been booked to play in a foursome later that afternoon, but he felt that all things considered it would have been churlish to have mentioned it . . .

NEXT MONTH . . .

27th Anniversary All-Star Issue

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ANDREW GARVE

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

JACOB HAY

complete SHORT NOVEL by

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

special reprint by

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SCHLOCK HOMES *rides again!*

Well, well, well! We suppose it had to happen eventually—so why not now? That famous detective—Monsieur C. Septembre Duping, no less! —calls upon Schlock Homes to help solve one of the most baffling disappearances in the entire history of crime, and The Great Detective truly outdoes himself—if that is possible . . . a Mt. Neverest in Schlock Homes's criminological career.

ADVENTURE OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF WHISTLER'S MOTHER

by ROBERT L. FISH

IT WAS SELDOM, INDEED, THAT THE successful conclusion of a case left my friend, Mr. Schlock Homes, dissatisfied and unhappy; but one such affair did occur in the latter part of '66, and I relate the case to demonstrate how the best intentions of the finest of men can at times lead to unwanted results.

The months preceding this particular affair had been busy ones, and reference to my case-book for that period reveals numerous examples in which his analytical genius was given full opportunity for expression. There was, for example, his brilliant solution to the strange affair of the American baseball manager who went berserk, which I find noted as *The Adventure of the Twisted Lip*; and shortly thereafter his attention was drawn to the mysterious curse placed upon the south forty of a local grange owned by a prominent manufacturer of stomach drugs. I am sure my readers will recognize the case, which I later delineated as *The Adventure of the Bane in the Lower Tract.*

One might reasonably have imagined, this being so, that when at long last a dropping off of activity afforded my friend a well-needed chance for rest he would have been pleased; but such was not the case. Boredom was always distasteful to Homes, and I was not surprised, therefore, to return to our quarters at 221B Bagel Street one late, blustery afternoon in October to find my friend, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his dressing-gown, sprawled out in a chair before the fireplace, glowering fiercely into the flames.

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Nor did he greet me in his customary manner, but came to his feet at my entrance and moved to the window restlessly, scowling down at the pavement.

I set aside my bag, removed my greatcoat and bowler, and was just turning to the sideboard, when a sharp ejaculation caused me to swing about and contemplate Homes. He was leaning forward, staring down at the street in sudden excitement, his entire attitude expressing inordinate interest.

"Homes!" I exclaimed. "What is it?"

"Come here, Watney," said he, and drew the curtains further apart as I obediently hurried to his side. His thin finger pointed downward, quivering with excitement. "What do you make of that poor fellow there? Harrowed, is he not?"

My glance followed the direction of his finger. The figure to which Homes was referring was dashing madly from one side of the street to the other, studying the numerals of the houses in obvious agitation. Despite the dank chill of the day he wore neither cape nor beaver; his hair was tousled, his waistcoat awry, and his manner extremely disturbed.

"Harrowed?" I repeated wonderingly, watching the eccentric path woven by the man below. "In my opinion, medically speaking, he appears not so much harrowed as ploughed."

"No matter," Homes replied with barely-concealed triumph. "The important fact is that he is coming to visit us, for you will note he has paused before our doorstep, and even now is entering. And here, if I am not mistaken, is our visitor now."

Homes was, as usual, correct, for there was the sound of footsteps pounding loudly on the stairs, and a moment later the door burst open. The disheveled man stood panting upon the threshold, casting his eyes about wildly until they lit on Homes.

"Schlock 'Omes!" he cried in a thick French accent. "Thank *le bon Dieu* I 'ave found you in!"

At closer sight of our visitor, Homes's eyes widened in sudden recognition. He hurried forward, taking our perturbed guest by the arm and leading him to an easy chair beside the fireplace.

"Duping!" he cried. "My Lord, man, what is the trouble? What brings you to London? And in this sorry state?" He turned to me, his eyes glowing. "Watney, this is none other than my old friend from Paris, Monsieur C. Septembre Duping! You may recall that back in '41 I was able to be of some slight assistance to him in that sinister business of the simian with the inclination for strangling women and stuffing them up chimneys."

"Of course," I replied warmly, my eyes fixed upon our famous visitor with admiration. "As I recall, I even recorded the case in my notes

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as *The Adventure of the Monk's Habit.*"

"Precisely," Homes agreed, and swung back to our guest, dropping into a chair across from him and leaning forward sympathetically. "Septembre, pray tell us what is bothering you."

The man seated facing him took a deep breath and then nodded. The warmth of the room after the raw weather outdoors had obviously done much to relax him, as well as the fact that I had hastened to furnish him with a whisky, taking one myself to keep him company.

"Yais," he said heavily, and raised troubled eyes to my friend's face. "'Omes, a terrible thing 'as 'appened. I know you are too *occupé* to come to Paris, but I still wished for ze benefit of your analytical brain."

"Of course," Homes replied warmly. "What is the problem?"

Our guest laid aside his empty glass and hesitated a moment, as if to emphasize the extreme gravity of the matter. When at last he spoke, the very quietness of his tone impressed us with his seriousness.

"'Omes," he said slowly, *"Whistler's Mother 'as been stolen!"*

If he had expected any great reaction from Homes, he was surely disappointed, for other than a slight narrowing of his eyes, caused by a puff of smoke from the fireplace, my friend's face remained impassive. "Ah? Most interesting. Pray continue."

"Yais." Dupin sighed deeply, and then plunged ahead. "Well, ze facts are zese. *Hier,* at ze Louvre, zey 'ave a *réception* for a new painter 'oo is visiting Paris, and to make ze affair properly impressive, zey arrange it in ze form of a musical *soirée,* calling ze programme ' 'Ello, Dali.' I mention zis fact only to explain why zere was so unusual-large a crowd zere; how you say, *normalment* at zis hour ze Louvre is quite empty. Well, to make a long story *court,* at nine o'clock, when ze *musicale* is start, Whistler's Mother is zere, where she 'as been for years. At ten o'clock, when everybody leave—" He spread his hands. "Gone! Wizout a clew!"

Homes, nodded, his eyes fixed on the other's unhappy expression. "I see."

"Yais. Well, I imagine you will want ze description." Our visitor thought a moment, assembling the data in his mind, and then continued. "A black background, and grey. 'Er size, in your English measurements, *approximativement* five-foot-four by four-foot-nine. As you can well understand, a 'eavy frame, of course. What else? Ah, yais—ze age. About ninety-five years, I believe." He shook his head sadly. "Let us 'ope she is in good condition when returned, and not damaged or smashed."

Homes nodded and sprang to his feet, beginning to pace the room, his thin hands clasped tightly behind his back. After several turns

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he came to stand before our guest, staring down with a frown on his face. "And has a reward been offered?"

Duping shrugged. "Money is no object, 'Omes. We will pay anyzing for ze return." He also rose, moving in the direction of the doorway. "We 'ave ze suspicion zat Whistler's Mother may already 'ave been smuggled out of France, possibly 'ere to England."

"A natural conclusion," Homes agreed. "And where are you staying in London?"

"I do not stay. I return at once to Paris. I came only to ask your 'elp."

"And you shall have it! You may expect to hear from me quite soon, giving you my solution to this puzzle. I shall get right to it this very evening, my dear Septembre."

"But, 'Omes—I mean, Homes," I interrupted in disappointment. "You have forgotten. We have tickets for Albert Hall to-night. The Rome Flood-Control Chorus is doing 'Hold That Tiber'."

He waved aside my objection almost impatiently. "Duty before pleasure, Watney," he replied a bit coldly. "Besides, I am not particularly interested in a programme consisting solely of popular tunes."

"But there is also classical music," I insisted, a bit stung by his tone. "Cyd Caesar is completing the programme by playing the 'Etude Brutus'."

Homes thought a moment and then shook his head. "In that case it is a pity, but I have already given my word." He returned his attention to our guest. "One last question, Septembre," he said softly, staring at the other intently. "And once the return is effected—?"

"We shall 'ang 'er, of course," Duping replied simply, and closed the door behind him.

No sooner had our guest left than Homes flung himself back into his chair, tenting his fingers, and staring across them towards me with a dark frown on his hawklike features.

"A tragedy, is it not, Watney?"

"Indeed it is," I readily agreed. "An old woman kidnapped!"

"No, no!" He shook his head at me impatiently. "You missed the entire point! The tragedy is that a poor wine-stewardess in a night-club should face such a penalty for the mere pilfering of several bottles of wine. Particularly since the poor soul was under the influence at the time and scarcely liable for her actions."

"I beg your pardon?" I asked bewildered. "I heard nothing to-day of night-clubs or wine-stewardesses. In fact, with the small amount of information Monsieur Duping furnished, I do not see how you can possibly hope to come up with any answer to the puzzle."

"Small amount of information? Really, Watney, at times I despair of you! Duping gave us more information than we really needed. For ex-

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ample, there was his description of the woman. Obviously, if she is five-foot-four by four-foot-nine, there was no need to inform us that she has a heavy frame. Similarly, if they plan to hang her when and if they get her back, it was scarcely necessary to tell us that her background was black. And being ninety-five years of age, one could automatically assume she would be grey. No, no, Watney! Duping gave us all we require. The real problem is how to handle it."

He swung about and stared fiercely into the flames of the fireplace, speaking almost as if to himself.

"There is a possibility, of course, that we can not only satisfy Duping but still save the poor old lady's life. If only—" He nodded to himself several times, and then turned around to face the room, glancing at his time-piece. "A bit early to make our move, though."

"Really, Homes," I said, deeply annoyed. "I honestly believe you are pulling my leg. That business before of wine-stewardesses and night-clubs! And now this mysterious muttering you are indulging in! What move, pray, is it too early to make?"

"Why," Homes replied, surprised, "to break into Professor Marty's digs, of course." He noted the expression on my face and suddenly smiled in a kindly fashion. "No, Watney, I am not teasing you. We have at least an hour to spare, so let me explain this sad case to you."

He leaned in my direction, ticking his points off methodically on his fingers.

"Let us start with Duping's description of the place where the old lady was last seen, and from which she disappeared, this place called the Louvre—or, in English, The Louver. That the place is a night-club is instantly discernible: the fact that normally it was deserted between the hours of nine and ten, long before the most frivolous of French patrons would think of beginning their evening's entertainment, the presence of music in the form of this 'Hello, Dali' revue; and most important, the name, so typical, and so similar to The Venetian Blind or The Window or The Cellar or others which we know to be so popular in Soho to-day. I should not hesitate to predict that their decor consists of louvers painted in green against a puce background. But no matter—let us continue."

A second finger was bent over to join the first, while I listened in open-mouthed wonder to his brilliant deductions.

"Now, precisely what was this elderly lady doing in this night-club? Obviously, she was not merely an habitué. Duping's exact words were, 'Where she 'as been for years.' Had she been a client, even the most constant, he almost certainly would have worded it differently. He would have said, 'Where she 'as

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been in ze 'abit of dropping in for years,' or something of that nature. Therefore, not being a client, we are forced to the conclusion that she is —or was, rather—an employee of the establishment, and one of long standing, at that.

"But in what position?" He shrugged before continuing. "Well, considering her age and her measurements, I believe we can safely eliminate the positions of waitress and hat-check girl, both of which demand a certain degree of beauty. Matron in the Mesdames? Again, I believe we can disregard this possibility; her exact presence or absence at any particular hour would scarcely have been noted with the exactitude that Duping indicated. And the same holds true, of course, for any of the kitchen staff. Cashier? With her black background it is doubtful if the owners would permit her near the till. There is, therefore, only one position left: Mrs. Whistler could only have been the wine-stewardess!"

A third finger was depressed as I listened, amazed, to this startling demonstration of incontrovertible logic. Homes's eyes remained half-closed as he continued to clothe the thin facts given by his friend with the warm flesh of his impeccable analysis.

"Now, Watney, consider: How could an old lady like this manage to subject herself to a penalty as severe as hanging in the short period allowed her between the hours of nine and ten? Certainly her crime was not murder, for which the French still maintain the guillotine. It must therefore have been something equally severe in the eyes of her accusers, but short of murder. It must also, of necessity, be something within her power to perform. Recalling that her position was that of a wine-stewardess, and that she had no access to any of the funds of the club, we can only reach one conclusion: that her crime consisted of taking some of the wine stocks. Undoubtedly rare and precious, and therefore probably cognac."

"But, Homes!" I objected. "Hanging? Just for stealing a few bottles of wine?"

He smiled at me pityingly. "It is apparent you know little of human nature, Watney. In the American colonies, as I am sure you are aware, the penalty for stealing a horse is hanging. And not so long ago punishment even more severe was reserved for anyone taking the King's deer. Why should France, where their national pride in their liqueurs is paramount, feel any less strongly? No, no! It is the only conclusion consistent with all the facts, and therefore must be the correct one. You know my dictum: when all theories but one have been eliminated, that remaining theory, however improbable—indeed, however impossible—must be the truth—or words to that effect."

I nodded dumbly. "Now," Homes went on, "when Duping told us

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that she had been stolen, you assumed his poor English prevented him from using the word 'kidnapped.' Actually, his poor English prevented him from stating what he truly meant—not that she had been stolen, but that she, herself, had stolen something."

I could not help but accept the faultless conclusion. "But, Homes, I said hopefully, "you suggest there were mitigating circumstances?"

"Yes. As I have already said, the poor woman was obviously under the influence of alcohol. You may recall Duping stating that he hoped she would not be 'smashed' when apprehended. It is an American slang term apparently becoming popular even in France. In any event, his very fear of this indicates that she stole the bottles in order to drink them—proof positive that her excessive thirst caused her crime in the first place. That she chose a moment when everyone was concentrating on the revue is easily understood. Under normal conditions she would have been too busy serving customers to have succumbed to the temptation to imbibe."

"But you say you hope to be able not only to satisfy Duping but also save the old lady?"

"There is that possibility."

"And this somehow involves Professor Marty?"

"Exactly." He considered me sombrely. "It will mean a bit of a risk to-night, but there is nothing else for it. If you do not care to join me in this venture, I shall not hold it against you. The Professor is undoubtedly the most dangerous man in all England."

"Nothing on earth could stop me from accompanying you, Homes!" I declared stoutly, and then frowned. "But where does Professor Marty come into this at all?"

He shook his head impatiently at my lack of perception. "Please, Watney! You may recall that when Duping suggested the old lady might even now be in England, I readily agreed. Why? Because the name Whistler is certainly not French, but rather British, and in times of trouble to whom would she turn, if not to her son in England? We can scarcely believe that with her black background her son is free of a taint of malfeasance, and no criminal in England is beyond the scope or knowledge of Professor Marty. No, no! If Whistler's mother is in England at the moment, you may be sure the Professor is well aware of it. By entering his rooms after he has left on his nightly foray against society, I hope to find proof of the fact. And possibly turn it to the advantage of that poor soul!"

"Bravo, Homes!" I cried, and could not help applauding both his motives and his infallible logic. Unfortunately, at the moment I was holding both a glass and a bottle, and while I shame-facedly hastened to clear up the debris, Homes disappeared into his room to change into more suitable raiment.

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It was past the hour of ten when our hansom dropped us around the corner of Professor Marty's darkened rooms in Limehouse. The night had turned cold, which afforded us a good excuse to keep our collars high and our faces hidden from the denizens of the district, who slunk past us to fade into the growing miasma rising from the river beyond. With a glance in both directions, Homes chose a moment when a swirl of fog momentarily hid us from any passers-by to swiftly mount the steps and apply his skill to the lock. A moment later he was beckoning me to follow; scant seconds more and he had closed the door, and his bull's-eye lantern was casting its restricted beam about the empty room.

"Quickly, Watney!" he whispered urgently. "We have little time! You take the den and the bedroom, while I examine the kitchen and bath." He took one look at my opening lips and added coldly, "We are looking for anything that might indicate the presence of the old lady here."

I nodded and began to close my mouth when I remembered something else. "But I have no lantern, Homes."

"Use vestas, then, if need be, but hurry!"

He disappeared even as I was fumbling beneath my cape, and an eerie chill swept over me until I had the first one lit and spied a taper on the mantel-piece. A moment later I was shielding the flickering flame and studying the room in which I stood. To me it appeared as any other room, and my heart sank as I realized how ill-equipped I was for a search of this nature, and that I might very well fail my friend. To bolster my spirits I went to the liquor cabinet, and at that moment the beam of Homes's lantern joined my weaker candle as he returned to the den.

"There is nothing," he said in a dispirited voice, and then his tone sharpened. "Watney! What are you doing?"

"Nothing—" I began guiltily, but before I could offer my excuses he had dropped down beside me and was reaching past my arm for the contents of the cabinet. A moment later and he was pounding my back in congratulation.

"Watney, you have done it! Good man!"

I stared in bewilderment as he began withdrawing bottles and examining them, muttering half to himself as he did so. "Cordon Bleu, Remy Martin, Napoleon, Courvoisier—excellent! With any luck this should do it!"

"But, Homes!" I interjected. "I do not understand. Do what?"

He swung to me with a fierce light of triumph in his eyes. "My dear Watney! When Duping expressed fear that the old lady would be apprehended in an inebriated state, he was not worrying about *her*, since he gave no indication of reducing the penalty for her crime.

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No, he was fearful that the cognacs would be consumed, for they are his main interest. By returning these to him, it is well possible that he will allow the matter to drop, and stop his pursuit of the poor woman."

His eyes swung about the room. "Quickly! Find me something in which to package these bottles while I pen a brief note to Duping to enclose. The packet to Le Havre leaves on the midnight tide, and by hurrying we can just make it."

While he bent over the escritoire, I hastily searched the room for wrapping materials, but despite my efforts the best I could find was an old roll of canvas that has been shoved behind a bookcase. I brought it forward hesitatingly and showed it to Homes.

"Ah, well," he said, shrugging, "it is certainly not the cleanest, for somebody has smeared it with tar or something. However, we have no time for further delays—it will have to do. Help me roll these bottles in it and we will be on our way to the dock. With any luck these will be in Duping's hands to-morrow, and our problem will have been solved."

Our exertions of the previous evening kept us both late abed, and it was close to the hour of noon before I came into our breakfast-room to find Homes already at the table. He nodded to me pleasantly and was about to speak when our page entered and handed Homes a telegraph form.

I seated myself, unfolded the afternoon journal, and was just reaching for the curried kidney when a sharp exclamation of dismay caused me to glance up. Homes, his face ashen, was staring in horror at the slip of paper in his hand.

"Homes!" I cried. "What is it?"

"I am an idiot!" he muttered bitterly. "An abysmal idiot! I should have anticipated this!"

"Anticipated what, Homes?" I enquired, and for an answer received the telegraph form flung across the table. I read it hastily; its message was succinct. HOMES, YOU HAVE DONE IT AGAIN. WHISTLER'S MOTHER IS ONCE AGAIN IN OUR HANDS AND HUNG, THANKS TO YOU.

"But, Homes!" I exclaimed. "I do not understand!"

"No?" he replied scathingly. "It is easily enough understood. I failed to take into account that the old lady might follow her booty back across the channel and thus fall into their hands! I am a fool! Rather than save her, I actually led her to her death."

"You must not blame yourself, Homes," I said with warm sympathy. "You did your best, and no man can do more."

"I did far too well," he replied balefully. "Without my help Duping might have searched for the old woman and her cognac for years." He tried to shake off his black mood, shrugging. "Ah, well! It is too late now to cry over spilt milk. Tell me, Watney, is there anything

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of a criminal nature in to-day's journal to help take my mind from this terrible fiasco?"

I hastily abandoned my kidney, perusing the newspaper instead, running my eyes rapidly down one column after another, but without too much success. There was, however, one weak possibility, and in lieu of a more interesting case I offered it.

"There is this, Homes," I said, studying the article further. "It seems that a very valuable painting was stolen from the French National Gallery; but the dateline is several days old. It may very well be that by this time the trail is much too cold."

The renewed sparkle in Homes's eyes told me that he was already well on the road to recovery.

"The time element makes no difference, Watney! A crime is a crime, and the more difficult the case, the better I like it! Besides, we have one bit of information the Sûreté lacks: we know that Professor Marty could not have been involved, for we would have come upon some evidence of it during our search. And eliminating this adversary takes us quite a step forward! A telegram to the authorities offering my services, Watney, if you will!"

CRIMINALIMERICKS

S. H. *by D. R. BENSEN*

Schlock Homes isn't loath to embrace
No matter how complex a case.
He assembles the facts,
Deduces, then acts,
And takes plaudits with egg on his face.

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the *NEWEST* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

As Lieutenant Decker, Chief of the Homicide Squad, was to say later, the case started out like it was going to be a blooper, but in the end it showed what good, careful detective work could do. And where did that leave Inspector Mitch Taylor? Look at the detective work he did —theory stuff, like you aren't suppose to dope out on an Inspector's pay—and when they started passing out the credit, Mitch found himself with something more important to worry about . . . another of Lawrence Treat's it-could-happen-in-real-life procedurals, the plot brightened by imagination and the characters highlighted by human nature . . .

B AS IN BLACKMAIL

by LAWRENCE TREAT

IN LINE WITH THE RULE BOOK, THE Homicide Squad handled a whole bunch of stuff besides actual murders, and sometimes you weren't even sure whether you had jurisdiction. So whenever a complaint came in late enough in the afternoon to keep you after five, you naturally tried to kiss it off. Which Inspector Mitch Taylor was particularly good at.

He was a chesty guy, on the short side for a cop. He had stiff, wiry hair, long eyelashes over dark, active eyes, and a high-pitched voice that had convinced a lot of people they'd be better off dropping a complaint and going on home. Or, if Mitch figured that wouldn't work, he just sent them down the hall to fill out some forms, which there were always plenty of to be done. By the time they were through, Mitch was out of sight and in the washroom, and one of the other guys got tagged.

But this week was different. With Amy and the kids visiting her sister back in New York, what was there to do except hang around headquarters? Because the apartment without Amy was just a hunk of empty space. And besides, if he put in a few evenings now, he'd have time coming to him when Amy got back home again. His target was a whole extra day. Eight hours, minimum.

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Anyhow, that was why he was in the Squad Room a little before five, and why he sat this female down at one of the half dozen desks and listened to her story. And let her string it out for two full hours, including the phone business.

He was reporting on the thing the next morning, in the tiny cubicle of an office that belonged to Lieutenant Bill Decker, Homicide. The Chief, a tall lean cop with gray eyes that warned you not to horse around unless he started it, knew his business all right and you had to respect him for it, but still—he was a shoo-fly, wasn't he? So you stayed on your side of the fence, and kept him on his.

"Name of Sara Jenks," Mitch said, consulting his pad. "Good-looking, but built like a fullback, except she's got more in front."

"What did she want?" Decker asked drily.

"Action, and lots of it. She claims this guy, Dr. Stuart Clarke, makes office appointments for her once a week, but all he wants is she'll show up and fork out thirty fish, and then go home. No treatment, no nothing."

"Why does she go?"

"Says she has to pay up, or else."

"What's he got on her?"

"Unmarried mother stuff. Clarke knows all the details about it—where her kid is, why she won't have him with her, and so on. Usual story, and on account she has this church job, she collects stories from people on what a tough time they've had and some day somebody's going to write a book about it or put it on TV—well, she's wide open, she'd get fired if Clarke told."

"What's your angle?" Decker asked. "Do you believe her?"

"I figure maybe she's gone on the guy and he won't give her a tumble, so she's been making these appointments with him. Only they don't get her anywheres, and now she's sore and wants to make trouble for him. 'Woman scorned' stuff."

"Done anything to check up on her story?"

"I told her we needed evidence," Mitch said, "and to call him right up, but be sure and use the word *blackmail*. Here's the conversation, the way I wrote it down last night listening in on the extension."

Mitch leaned back and delivered his lines in a stiff, self-conscious monotone. "Her speaking: 'Doctor,' she says, 'about that extortion money I'm paying you. I want—' Then he interrupts her, see? Now here *he* is, speaking.

"Him: 'Please don't bother me now, I'm busy. If you want to talk to me, speak to my nurse and make an appointment.' Then he hangs up. Click." Mitch put his pad down, gave it another look, then stuck it in his pocket.

"Can't tell much from that," the Lieutenant said. "He doesn't either admit or deny. But you're pretty sure she's making all this up, aren't you?"

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Mitch was sure enough, but he saw the trap. The Lieutenant wanted him to take the responsibility, so Mitch sidestepped. "Maybe you better talk to her and see what you think," he said.

"I'll take your word for it," Decker said. "The next step is to ease her out, instead of calling her bluff."

Mitch agreed with that. Push her, and you could end up with two investigations instead of one—the doctor for extortion and the dame for malicious persecution, and maybe perjury, too. So you had to give her an out, and Mitch knew pretty well what to say. You thank her for doing her duty as a citizen, you say you wish there were more like her, that most people would be scared of all the questioning they'd have to face, the messing into their private lives. You point out that it takes a lot of time and there's an emotional strain and in the end there's a big trial with everything coming out in public.

You lay it on thick and say you respect her too much to make her go through all that, and then you tell her she can drop the whole business if she wants to—maybe she'd like to think it over? Nine times out of ten she says she will, and a few years from now the statute of limitations runs out and she's still thinking it over. So everybody's happy and why not?

The Lieutenant wouldn't exactly go along with all that, but on the other hand he didn't want to be suckered into anything, and Mitch was the boy to take the heat off.

"What you'd better do is this," Decker said. "Drop in on Charlie Wardwell down in Maintenance and get one of those miniature broadcasting mikes. She can pin it under a brooch or else just wear it inside her dress. Then tell her we want her to go see this Dr. Clarke and get him to admit the extortion. Make sure she knows you'll be outside with a tape recorder and that you'll catch everything she says. Set it up, you and Bankhart, and show her you mean business. Be ready to go through with it if you have to, but—give her a chance to bow out."

Mitch stood up. "Sure," he said. "I'll handle it."

He had a nice, easy day ahead of him. He'd go down and chew the fat with Charlie for a while, then he'd get the audio equipment, then he'd get hold of Bank, and after that the pair of them would go see this Sara female. With luck Mitch could add on a couple hours of overtime.

Everything went pretty much the way Mitch expected. He got the mike, and he and Bank stopped in at Sara's and explained their plan. They had this tiny microphone and transmitter fitted inside a brooch that she could pin on her dress. Mitch and Bank, in a car a block away, would have a tape recorder that would operate whenever Sara's mike transmitted the sound of a voice.

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She said she used the same kind of equipment in her own work, so she understood the hookup, and she complimented Mitch on the way he'd arranged things. He said it wasn't just him; the Homicide Squad was a team and they all worked together, but nobody wanted to push her, so why didn't she think things over and they'd be back in the morning.

That was when she exploded. "Think what over?" she demanded.

"What you're getting yourself into," Mitch said, kind of off-hand, "and whether you want to go through with it."

"Stuart Clarke committed a serious crime," she said. "Do you want to condone it? Is that what you're suggesting?"

"We need evidence," Mitch said, "and I'm trying to make it easy for you."

"I don't care whether it's easy or not," she stormed. "He belongs in jail, and that's where you're going to put him."

"Sure," Mitch said, "but we got to do everything strictly legal. So first, maybe you better call Dr. Clarke and make an appointment."

She shook her head. "What for?" she said. "We can go over there right now and see him. Why wait?"

Mitch drove, and she and Bank sat in back while Bank went over everything with her once more and impressed on her how it was up to her, that the police couldn't function unless they had her help.

Dr. Stuart Clarke's shingle hit you in the face as you went past a neat lawn and a brick house that looked big enough for both residence and office. The parking area was in back and Mitch couldn't see if there were any cars there or not. He rolled past the joint slow, but not too slow, and then he turned the corner and parked.

Sara got out and walked off. She was a little broad in the beam for Mitch's taste, so his only interest in her was how well she was going to do her job. And while she looked like she finished whatever she started, Mitch was still a little leery of her.

"She's got something in mind," he said. "Bank, I'll bet you two bits the doc isn't even home, and she knows it."

Bank took out his quarter and Mitch took out his, and they put the two coins on the ledge above the dashboard. After that he and Bank waited. They didn't talk much because they wanted to be ready to listen to whatever was going to be said by or to Sara, and they didn't know when the conversation would start. So they waited. And it happened.

They thought they heard a cough or a click or some kind of sound just before Sara's voice came on, but the noise wasn't clear, and its exact nature was never established. Sara's opening words, however, were unusually distinct.

"Oh," she said, "good evening. Does the doctor make everybody sit

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here in the half darkness?" A male voice rumbled something—the words "half an hour" were the only ones they could make out, and then Sara piped up again. "Do you mind if I turn on a light?" she said.

A switch clicked—that particular sound was definitely identified; but what the tape recorded after that was pretty much what you would have got forty years ago in the middle of a thunderstorm on a crystal set you hadn't tuned in too good. It seemed that Charlie Wardwell, in Maintenance, hadn't thought about fluorescents. Or if he had, he kept the news to himself.

At the time Mitch merely said, "Damn that Charlie," and Bank said, "Wait till I get hold of him." Then they both stopped thinking about Charlie and began thinking about that quarter bet. Then they heard the shot. And the screaming.

Mitch, still behind the wheel, started up the car and raced around the corner and headed for the Clarke house. He knew there'd been three people there, Sara and the doctor and the guy she'd talked with in the waiting room, and that one of them must have got shot. And if the waiting-room guy had done it, he might be off and running. So Mitch said to Bank, "I'll take the front—you cover the back, huh?"

"Right," Bank said.

He practically somersaulted himself out of the car as Mitch jammed on the brakes, but Mitch got out real slow. He figured Sara was the one who'd been screaming and that she'd seen whatever had happened and would tell him all about it. No problem there. But on the other hand somebody had a gun, and that made a situation that Mitch wasn't overanxious to tangle with.

What he did was, he made plenty of noise opening the door, so as not to scare anybody into shooting. Then he called out, "Miss Jenks? Anything wrong? It's me, Taylor."

Nobody answered, so Mitch took a few steps down the corridor, saw the waiting room over to the left, and went in. There was a guy lying in the doorway at the other end of the room and there was a gun next to him, and he seemed dead. Sara, huddled up on a couch, was kind of crying to herself. She looked up at Mitch and he sensed that if he said the wrong thing she'd go hysterical on him and then what?

He tried to cut off anything like that by acting natural, like he was used to walking in on dead bodies every hour on the hour. He nodded in the direction of the guy there on the rug and said, "Who is he?"

"Dr. Clarke," Sara said, tense and hardly able to get the words out.

"What did you shoot him for?" Mitch said, asking the stock question that worked maybe once out of twenty times.

This was one of the times it didn't work. Sara said, "I had nothing to do with it. There was a man here—he was here when I came in—he

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shot the doctor—and he might have shot me, too!"

Mitch was scared she'd fall apart and he'd have her on his hands, so he looked away from her and said, "Nuts—what for?" He said it drily, without emotion, and he turned around a little—and that was when he saw the red-head.

She was tall and good-looking and she came down the stairs like she owned the joint and was wondering if this was the man who'd come to fix the leaky faucet.

Mitch spoke to her before she could come into the room and see the body. "Who are you?" he said

"Mrs. Clarke, and I'd like to know what's going on down here."

Then she stepped into the room, and she found out. Mitch, watching her real close, saw her face go tight, but he didn't know exactly why, except she obviously was no loving wife and didn't fall apart. In fact, she didn't even bother crossing the room to see if her husband was dead.

Bank, coming in around then, had pretty much the same impression as Mitch, but about all Bank did was ask who the guy on the floor was and then claim Mitch's two bits. With that settled, he got busy.

They knew their jobs and they went straight to work. Phone headquarters and get the police machinery started, phone Decker and brief him, then separate the two dames, Sara and the Clarke female, and ask them a few fast questions while they were still off-balance. But first, exchange whatever information there was.

Bank had one item. "Somebody beat it out of here right after the shot was fired—that's a quickie from the next-door neighbor. And while I was outside I heard a car start and get the hell out, in a big hurry."

"Must have been the guy Sara spoke to in the waiting room," Mitch said. "Maybe we're in luck."

Although Sara had seen him and been an eyewitness to the actual shooting, she was so upset that she was vague in her description, and she was all mixed up on the details. She kept saying that the police had it down on tape, what more did they want?

"We want to know what he looked like," Mitch said.

"It was half dark when I came in. When I turned on the light, it blinded me. Then he shot the doctor and I ran. I was so afraid."

"You ran where?"

"I just ran. Across the room, I guess, but I tripped on the couch and fell. And then you came in."

Her timing was 'way off, but Mitch was used to that. Witnesses who'd been right there, they'd see everything except the one thing that was important—you got so that was what you expected.

The Clarke dame wasn't much help, either. She had a story about how her kid, his name was Eddie

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and he was nine years old, he'd cut his finger and she'd gone to the bathroom to get a Band-Aid to fix it. That was why she hadn't come down for a while. She'd heard a noise like a shot, yes, but she was paying attention to her kid, he came first, and please—*please* leave her alone. She was all nerves. Just leave her alone, wouldn't they?

After that, the Homicide Squad and the Medical Examiner and the photographic unit and an assistant D.A. and the various experts and all the big brass began to show, along with the reporters and the usual crowd of hangers-on. Naturally, nothing much could happen tonight—too many people around and too much organizing going on.

Still, Mitch had a pretty good idea of what was what, and it boiled down to finding out who had skipped out of the house right after the shot. Nab him, show him to Sara, have her identify, and you had your case all wrapped up.

Mitch spent the rest of the night, up until one in the morning, checking some names on a list which might include the one they wanted. Mitch didn't know where the list came from or why the Lieutenant had picked it or what else was being done in the case. All Mitch knew was, he had four guys to chase down and find out if they could have been in Dr. Clarke's office at the time of the homicide.

Mitch chased them and got their alibis, and the four of them were clean, so he went back to headquarters with the information. The Lieutenant was tired, and when he was tired you beat it fast, which Mitch did by going across the street and having a cup of coffee at the Greek's. Then he took a late bus home and went to bed. What with all this extra work, he had a whole day off coming to him, and then some. He slept fine.

In the morning he turned on the radio while he made himself some breakfast. What they said about the Clarke case was, two detectives had been a block away and had listened in on the murder, but they hadn't stopped it and they hadn't caught the killer and something had gone wrong with the tape. Or maybe, the commentator added, something had gone wrong with the police. Then he made some crack about Keystone cops, and Mitch switched the thing off.

Down at headquarters the Lieutenant had a briefing scheduled, and the eight-man Homicide Squad was waiting around for it, along with a few other officers who were on the case. Maybe because that Keystone-cop crack on the radio had made everybody sore, the squad didn't kid Mitch or Bank too much, so they were off the hook.

When the Lieutenant marched in he was all business. What he said was, the tape didn't help much. The victim was a doctor who might or might not have been blackmailing Sara, and other people too, and he'd

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been shot with his own gun, which he kept in a drawer of his office desk. He had a license for the gun and he'd bought it to scare off narcotic users, ever since one of them had walked in on him and forced him to hand over his drug supply.

They had one break there. Dr. Clarke kept the gun unloaded and had no bullets around, so the first approach to the case, and maybe the best one, was find out who'd bought ammunition for it. And Decker ticked off the names of four of the squad and assigned them to tracing the purchase of the ammunition.

After that he went on with the other approach, which was people. Clarke's nurse, a cutie by the name of Betty Post, had had the afternoon off, the way she always did on Tuesdays. Clarke kept his Tuesday office hours, five to seven, but it was first come, first served and nothing in the appointment book—so there was no telling who'd been in the waiting room when Sara had gone in. And she kept contradicting herself on her description of the killer, so what it came down to was you could practically forget her evidence. In fact, you couldn't even rule out a woman as the killer.

Edwina Clarke, the victim's wife, was high on the list of suspects. She'd been in the house all evening and she had a motive, and all she could say was she'd been bandaging her little boy's finger when she heard a loud noise, which was probably the shot. The kid did have a cut on his finger, but he didn't remember hearing any shot and he was not clear as to when he'd gotten that cut. Right now, Edwina Clarke was either in shock or else she was hiding behind her physician, and the Lieutenant hadn't been able to question her in depth, which was too bad. Because she was a slambang of a red-head.

Leave it to the Lieutenant, though, to dig up what really counted. He'd found out that the Clarke marriage was on the rocks and that Edwina had a boy friend. Name of Raymond Randall. Originally he'd been a friend of the doctor's, and he'd had the run of the house and practically been a member of the family. They had him up at the precinct now, while they were checking out his alibi. Decker expected him down at headquarters in an hour or so and intended to give the guy his personal attention. And that was that. Any questions?

There were a bunch of questions, most of them having to do with whether Randall had beat it before or after the shot and whether Edwina and Randall were in this together, and if not, which of the two of them was the likelier killer. The Lieutenant answered the first few questions all right, but then he got the idea that the squad was stalling, and he ripped into them like he was being paid for it, and the session broke up.

The assignment Mitch got was going into the background of this

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Raymond Randall, how he got to know the Clarkes and whether he'd been married before and what came of the marriage and what his financial standing was and whether he'd ever been in trouble and what his reputation was—stuff like that.

Mitch dug, and he found out that Randall had been spending all his time at the Clarkes', and not just on Edwina's account, either. He'd made some passes at this nurse, Betty Post, and it was a toss-up which he was serious about and which he was cheating on, Betty or Edwina. Anyhow, here was some dope that the Lieutenant ought to have, so Mitch went back with it.

He'd just parked his car in its usual place in the courtyard, when Charlie Wardwell came over. Charlie had a wise-guy grin on him and was all set with some crack about Keystone cops, only Mitch jumped him first.

"You sure got yourself in trouble," he said. "What are they going to do about it?"

"Trouble? Me?" Charlie said. "What are you talking about?"

"That mike you gave us—the bum one that gives out all the noise when fluorescent lights are on."

"Anybody ought to know they'd interfere."

"Yeah?" Mitch said. "Is that what you're going to tell the Commissioner?"

The idea got Charlie sore. "Speaking of mikes," he said, with an edge to his voice, "where is it? You signed for it, and it's twenty-five bucks worth of police property. You going to turn it in, or get charged for it?"

Mitch whistled. "I clean forgot about it!" And whatever Charlie said next, Mitch didn't even hear. Things didn't usually get under his skin, but this business of maybe shelling out good dough—that hurt.

Inside, Decker had a piece of news for Mitch. The Lieutenant had spent the morning with Randall, and Randall admitted being in the Clarke house at the time of the shooting. Furthermore, he admitted he was the guy who had run out of the Clarke house and jumped into his car, but he claimed he'd been upstairs with Edwina at the time of the shooting.

"Ought to be easy to nail him now," Mitch said.

Decker nodded. "Too easy. I'll get Sara over here and she'll probably identify Randall as the killer—she's been saying yes to practically everything—and he'll be charged. But brother, what an identification! A nervous woman with two cops hearing her every time she took a deep breath, and then her telling somebody what a bum light there was—what a wingding of a witness *she* is!"

"What do you want me to do?" Mitch asked.

"Bring her over here," the Lieutenant said. "What else?"

Mitch hunted up Bankhart and the two of them drove over to Sara

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Jenks's. She wasn't home, so Mitch went over to the church she worked for, only she wasn't there either; but he found a sign that told you when services were held and where the Ladies' Aid was. He figured that Sara was at the Ladies' Aid, and he was right.

She had a big office with three desks and phones on all of them, and a bunch of records and books and some tape recorders and that kind of junk lying around all over the place. The filing cabinets were the old-fashioned wooden ones that you could sell to the movies if they wanted a shot of what an office looked like in the 1890s.

Because first things came first, Mitch led off with his own business. "Sorry to bother you," he said, friendly-like, "but that mike we gave you yesterday—we never got it back."

"I gave it to somebody," Sara said, and when she said something, that was it. "I know I did."

It could be she'd handed it to the wrong guy, but where would Mitch be if he assumed people were telling the truth? It would be like betting against himself.

"Look, lady," he said, and he was just as definite as she'd been. "That was police property, so let's have it."

"But I just told you—"

"You told me you gave it to somebody, but the guy you're supposed to give it to is me. You took it from me, didn't you? And you got no use for it, so why—"

That was where Mitch stopped himself, on account she had plenty of use for it. She needed stuff like that all the time for those interviews of hers. She was an expert on how to record and what equipment worked when, and all of a sudden he remembered what she'd said last night when he'd accused her of homicide. Instead of resenting the charge and telling him off, she'd accused somebody else.

What it boiled down to was, she'd acted as if she'd known all along there was nothing on the tape. So she could make up her own story—and maybe she had.

It hit him like a ton of bricks that she had one sweet alibi—namely, that there was another voice recorded and she could say it belonged to the killer, and nobody could prove otherwise. And what's more, any voice would do. Any man's.

The doctor's.

What she had going for her was that nobody would expect her to commit a homicide while she was on the air, so to speak, with Mitch and Bank listening in. And against her was she had plenty of motive, and a gilt-edge opportunity. She'd wanted right along to get even with the doctor for giving her the cold-shoulder, but she had to get rid of him before he up and said the extortion charge was a phony.

Mitch's whole idea, though, needed a lot more thinking, and in any case it wasn't up to Mitch to dope things out, because what if it turned

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out he was wrong? For a Lieutenant's paycheck you cooked up theories, but on Mitch's salary you let somebody else carry the ball. So all Mitch was supposed to do right now was tell Sara that the Lieutenant wanted to see her. Only Mitch never got the chance.

"Mr. Taylor," Sara said, real nasty, "are you implying that I *took* that microphone?"

"Sure," he said. "Who else?"

"Mr. Taylor," she said again, and she was having a little trouble breathing, although she could still spit poison, "I intend to report you for such an accusation, and I assure you that I've had enough contact with the Police Department to know precisely how to do it."

"No kidding?" he said. He figured she could do a lot of damage to him—complaints like that could hurt you; so the best way to handle her was to needle her so she lost her head and got stupid. So he said, "No kidding? Go right ahead, only can I use the phone first?"

What he had in mind was, he'd say to the Lieutenant, in a loud voice so that Sara would hear, that she was giving him a little trouble and that a couple of things had happened and that there was a new angle to the case. The point was, it ought to scare her, and at the same time it would show, later on and if it turned out she was guilty, that he'd cracked the case ahead of everybody else.

He turned his back to her while he got Extension 10, Homicide, which was the Lieutenant personally. But before Mitch could get a word in, the Lieutenant was telling him to bring the Jenks female in right away because they'd just traced the ammunition purchase and it was Sara. She'd bought the bullets and she'd killed Dr. Clarke, and Mitch had better be careful.

Mitch said okay, sure, but he was wondering how in hell he could ever make anybody believe he'd figured this out all by himself. Then he put the phone down and turned, and he saw Sara putting down another one at one of the other desks. She'd been listening in on an extension and she'd heard everything, and she gave Mitch a funny, glassy look. She opened a drawer of her desk and came up with a switchblade, and she snapped it open like she meant business. She came at him quiet, no sound at all except the swish of her dress.

It crossed Mitch's mind that he'd have to pull a gun on her. And that when he did, he'd use it, and that if you killed a suspect or even wounded one, and particularly a dame, it spelled real trouble. But Bank seemed to come up out of nowhere, except actually he'd been right behind Sara. Anyhow, he chopped down on her wrist and sent the knife spinning, and he got an armlock on her before she even knew what was happening.

They used Mitch's handcuffs, and that's how they brought her in.

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The next day the Lieutenant had the usual session in the Squad Room and pulled the whole story together. It seemed that Mitch had her number right from the beginning. She'd been sweet on Dr. Clarke but he was trying to hold her off, so she kept making those appointments. When he wouldn't give her a tumble she got sore and came into headquarters with that made-up extortion story. And when the police wanted evidence before they believed her, she was up against it.

From the kind of work she was doing, she could practically play tricks with microphones and tapes, and she figured out that scheme of hers. She knew those fluorescent lights would scramble the tape and she knew where Dr. Clarke kept his gun and she knew it wasn't loaded.

So she swiped the gun ahead of time and had it with her, in her purse, when she went to see him. She pretended there was somebody else in the waiting room, then she got the doctor's voice on tape and then she turned on the lights and shot him. And what made her plan almost work was that Randall happened to be in the house and that he panicked and ran out when he heard the shot. That made it seem as if there had been a third person present, just like Sara claimed.

The Lieutenant ended up by saying how this case, while it started out like it was going to be a blooper, showed what good, careful detective work could do. In particular, he singled out Charlie Small for tracing the purchase of the ammunition, and Bankhart for his quick work when Sara went beserk. And that just about tied it up.

The Lieutenant finished, and he didn't look at Mitch and Mitch didn't look at him. Because Mitch had other things on his mind, namely what about that mike and would they really charge him for it?

He figured he'd better get busy, protecting himself on that one. Credit for solving the case? The heck with that—it was the cash, not the credit, that was worrying Mitch.

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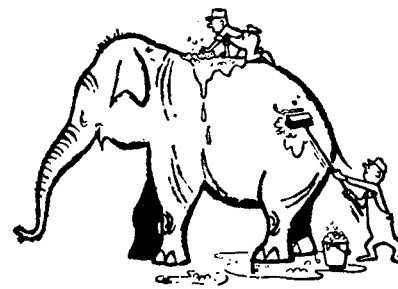

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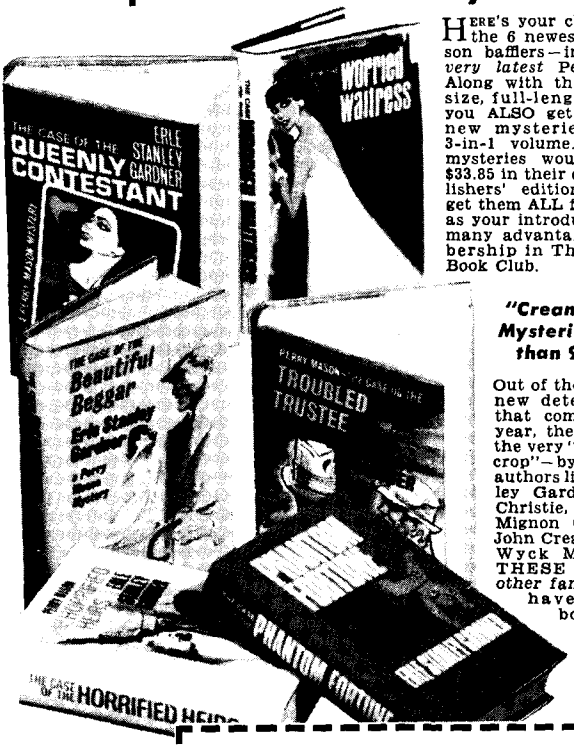
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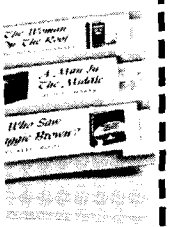

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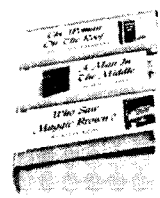

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